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Giant western

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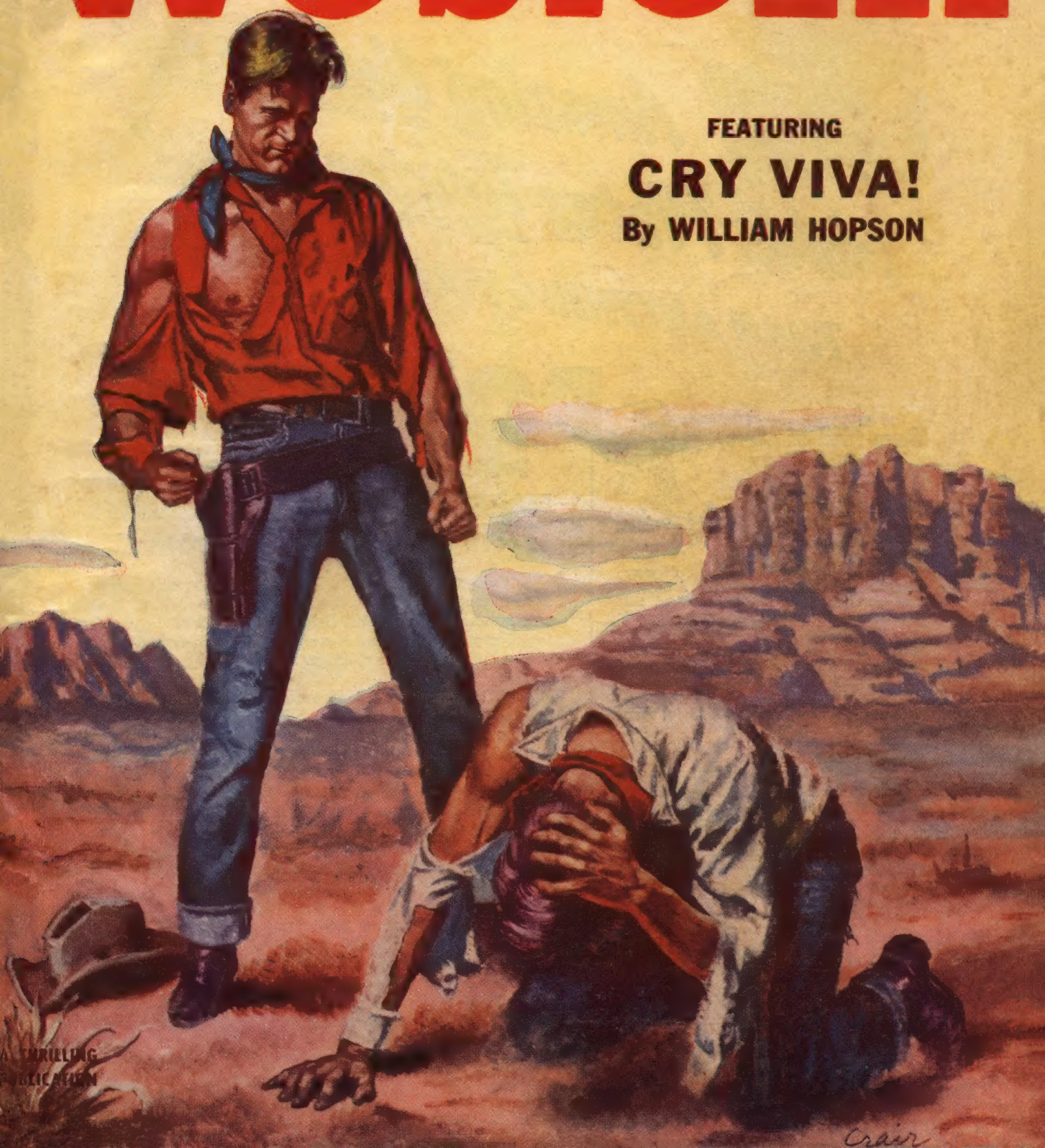

FEATURING

CRY VIVA!

By WILLIAM HOPSON

LOOSE FALSE TEETH?

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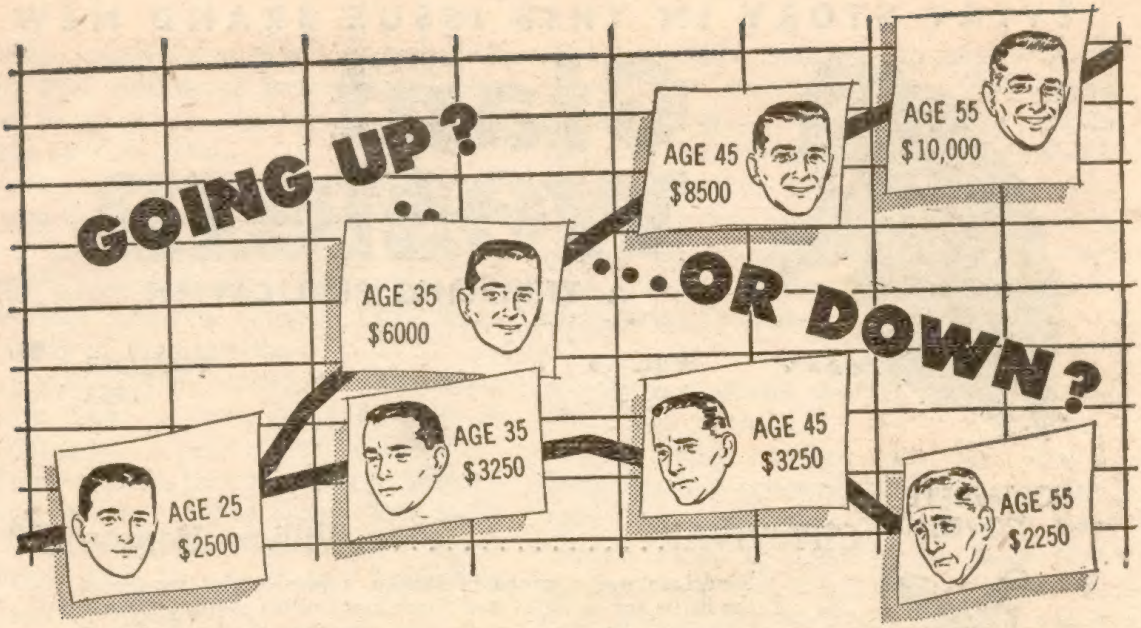

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Giant western

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VOL. 10
NO. 3

DECEMBER
1952

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SAMUEL MINES, *Editor*

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FUR, FINS and FEATHERS

A Department Conducted by FRANCIS H. AMES, Hunting and Fishing Expert

WHEN chewing the fat around the fire this winter, many of us will moan about the lack of fish and game. Most sportsmen do not realize that it is this very scarcity that puts the zest in the deal. Take it from one who knows; over-abundance can bring about a lessening of interest, a lack of keenness for the chase.

Choke every pool with trout and you'll soon be seeking suckers. Cram every covert with pheasant and you'll be shooting chick-a-dees. Let the ladies take up nudity enmasse and a wind-blown skirt, a well-turned ankle, will bring no gleam of interest to the male eye.

This was forcibly brought home to me while eagerly scouring the sage flats of eastern Oregon last fall for sage grouse. I looked back to an early day when I considered it something of a chore to shoot a winter's supply of these birds in eastern Montana. Early Montana settlers often took the breasts only from flocks that required a half-hour to pass a given point in their slow, leisurely feeding walk.

The clattering rise, the whir of wings, that breathless split-second of time when one judges lead, rate of climb, finger tightening on the shotgun trigger, cannot be enjoyed when one wades through flocks that are as numerous as flies at a slaughter-house dump.

To-day I consider it great sport to ram through the brush, seeking a rabbit or two for the pot. It wasn't such fun when rabbits trampled down the newly fallen snow on our front porch during the night until a man had to scrape it off with a hoe. Rabbit paths wound over the range in the early days, beaten into the sod by the passing of multitudes. Their ghostly wraiths scampered about in the moon glow reflected from the diamonds of the prairie snow at night, until one felt that the land pulsed and heaved with them. Under such conditions the modern hunter would soon lose his enthusiasm. The chorusing beagle would come to frustration. It is true, believe me, for only two years back I saw wild Flemish Giant rabbits by the hundreds of thousands on a two-by-four island in the Pacific, that quickly withered a man's zest to rise before dawn for a day's sport.

I nearly ruined my eagerness for salmon fishing a few years back on the Umpqua river, by finding these monster fish too numerous, too easy to tie into. Hauling out a royal chinook at every cast can get mighty tiresome, incredible as this may seem to today's anglers. Only last year I saw rainbow trout, ranging up over two feet in length, so numerous in a northwest stream that I now prefer other trout species to rainbow, and for no sane reason. The skillful cast, the perfecting of technique, the gloating over the creeled beauty, come to nought when hungry fish cram the water like bees in a hive.

So lean back, boys, and enjoy yourselves, while you discuss beating each other next spring to the big walloper that lives under the fallen tree in the old mill stream. Be thankful that there aren't so many "big fellows" that there'd be no competition, no pride in achievement, no skill required in taking them. Last fall's deer hunt that you now discuss with such satisfying memories would have been a pot-shooting bust if the big woods heaved with royal bucks, as the buffalo once made the prairie shudder with their passing. Buffalo Bill was a hard working meat hunter, not a sportsman.

It's the chase that counts, that tingles the nerves. There is no chase when every cast brings a dozen rises, every step down the hedge row produces the roaring of a thousand wings. Thinking along these lines, I've found, brings a heap of satisfaction with things as they are, when the boys gather around the cracker-barrel to exchange salty reminiscences.

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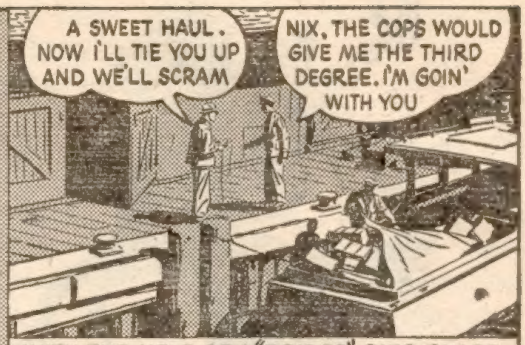
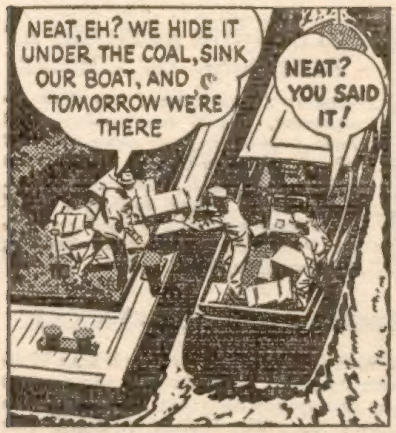


WITH THE HELP OF A "BRIBED" PIER GUARD, THE RIVER PIRATES PREPARE TO MAKE OFF WITH A PRIZE HAUL...



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Famous Last Words

What They Said Before They Cashed Their Chips

By BUCK BENSON

THOUGH legend has it that the cowboy died with the word "Mother" on his lips, or with a request that his boots be taken off, the facts show that he was apt to be much less pious and much more original.

A hardcase named Black Jack refused the attentions of a minister and demanded that his executioneers hurry up the proceedings.

"I've got a date to have lunch in hell and I don't want to be late," he announced.

The hangman obliged, placing a mask over the murderer's face and asking, "Are you ready, Black Jack?"

Strong and confident came the reply, "Let 'er rip!"

In the same callous vein the bloody Boone Helm watched his fellow murderers hang with the calm remark, "Another in hell. Kick away old fellow, I'll join you in a minute." When his own turn came Boone shouted, "Every man for his principles. Hurrah for Jeff Davis." And, echoing Black Jack, his final cry was, "Let 'er rip!"

After the battle of the O.K. Corral Billy Clanton asked bystanders to pull off his boots, as did Black Face Charley, another of the more conventional bad men. Much more sporting was the anonymous gunfighter shot by Captain Harry Wheeler of the Arizona Rangers. This man looked up at Wheeler and said:

"No hard feelings pardner. You just beat me to it."

The scout Tom Horn, who came to a bad end as a result of his misdeeds, remarked that his captors were, "the sickest-looking bunch of sheriffs I ever saw."

UNCOUNTED numbers of lawmen and desperadoes died in a blaze of gunfire with no words for posterity, but a criminal hung by the various vigilante groups of the West was usually given a chance to speak his mind before he died. Cherokee Bill immortalized himself by his answer to the question, "Have you any last words?"

Said the dauntless Bill, "I didn't come here to windjam, I come to die."

More philosophical though equally short were the last words of Bat Masterson, who died quietly and alone of heart failure while working on a New York newspaper. Before him on his desk lay a sheet of paper on which he had written:

"Pretty good old world after all. The rich get their ice in summer, the poor in winter."

WILL Bunton of the infamous Plummer gang announced, "I care no more for hanging than I do for taking a drink of water." All Bill wanted was a good drop from the scaffold, as he shared the common fear of strangle-hanging. "I wish I had a mountain three hundred feet high to jump off of," was his heartfelt wish at the last moment.

Bill Hunter, another member of the Plummer outfit, said nothing memorable but his actions spoke louder than his words. As he dangled from the rope Hunter went through all the motions of drawing his Colt and firing six times, the involuntary reaction of his trained gunfighter's muscles.

It remained for Bill Dowdle, an Idaho horse-thief, to voice the devil-may-care sentiments most characteristic of the old West. Long after the sententious platitudes of the politicians have faded from memory old Bill's words will live. Heavily fortified with whiskey, Bill was shooting at anyone who came into view when a storekeeper downed him with a .45 slug. Bill died almost instantly, but not before remarking in a loud voice, "Such is life boys, in the days of '49!"

CRY VIVA!

A Novel by WILLIAM HOPSON

Sandrigan was a gringo in Mexico . . . a Mexico that rang with the battle cry of Villa . . . and Sandrigan had his own war to fight!

She fought savagely as I struggled to keep the muzzle of the Colt down

I

THAT morning at the hacienda of my patron, Don Sebastian Sanchez y Galindo, I had waited out the hours until noon for him and the impresario from Mexico City to show up. And when noon came with still no sign of the big six-horse coach putting in an appearance from Santa Rosa, four miles away, I began to get worried.

He had sent word from the great town house for me to have ten of our best fighting

A Gunfighting American Weaves a Thread of

bulls ready for the buyer's inspection. I had them ready, ten *Piedras Negras* or Black Rocks, four years old, the cream of our fourth-year crop.

It takes four years to breed a good fighting bull into full prime, and the mothers of every one of these had charged the picador lances in the *tienta* tests no less than twelve times before giving up in the face of bloody-shouldered pain. Otherwise, Don Sebastian would have marked them unfit to propagate his famous fighting strain and sold them to less particular breeders.

It had been the bull son of one of his offcasts that had ripped open my belly in a bull ring and ended my career as a matador. Just a third-rate animal in his estimation of bulls, but Don Sesatian had picked me up and made me an overseer anyhow.

Overseer and breeder of bulls that had killed more men in the arena than any other of the four famous strains.

And now I had them ready for the inspection by the impresario from Mexico City.

The bull boxes were at the chutes, ten ox-carts ready to begin the slow, wheel-creaking four-mile haul to the railroad in Santa Rosa. In the shade of the chutes the bull handlers and cart drivers smoked corn-shuck *macuche* while those one-thousand-pound black bulls with the beautiful, precisely even horns ambled restlessly, uneasy at being separated for the first time in their lives from gentle oxen companions.

Ten of them. Ten of the finest and deadliest ever bred in Mexico.

I went over to Juanito Camacho, the segundo, or straw boss. He straightened his huge frame away from the wheel of an ox-cart and carefully removed the corn-shuck butt from between his prized mustachios. Everybody, almost, wore them long and upswept after the fashion set by old Dictator Diaz decades back.

I WAS depending one hell of a lot upon Juanito these days because he and his braggart young brother José and Arturo Felix were the only men on the great hacienda who knew at first hand what *revolucion* really meant, and I placed little confidence in the other two. Juanito had been in the thick of the fighting when Pancha Villa took Juarez in that memorable battle earlier in the revolution.

Now, as I approached Juanito, he shifted the Mauser rifle slung over his fat back, grinning an expectant grin.

"What do you think happened, Don Guillermo?" he asked me.

I said, "I don't like to think. I'll have to ride to town to find out. Open the gate and let the oxen rejoin the bulls. I want them quiet until the coach arrives."

We could have had telephones between the hacienda and the huge town house in Santa Rosa, where Don Sebastian was now living close by the protective guns of Major Garcia and his small Federal garrison. But Don Sebastian, a former general in old Pofirio Diaz's armies was a stickler for the old ways. A man was no man unless mounted on a horse. A six-horse coach was far preferable to those sputtering automobiles befouling the air in Mexico City, and frightening the carriage spans. And no telephones—not when we had two hundred and forty pure-bred Morgan horses and plenty of good riders.

Juanito hitched at the criss-cross bandoliers of gleaming cartridges over his huge shoulders. "Maybe," he suggested, softly, "the coach of *el patron* finally got caught by some *revoltosos*, eh?"

I thought, That's a hell of a thing to be thinking when *you* once rode with Pancho Villa, the worst Spaniard hater of them all.

But Juanito shrewdly guessed what had made many of my nights hellish—

Don Sebastian, finally persuaded by me to seek protection in town, contemptuously traveling in his coach without the vaquero guards I'd stationed in town; and Torcuata making those wild, reckless rides the four miles between town and the hacienda. I didn't want to face her and her aunt and uncle, Tia and Tio Galindo, and tell them what had happened to another *rico* Spaniard at the hands of *revoltosos*. I didn't want to have to tell Don Sebastian what had happened to Torcuata, should she ever

PANCHO VILLA

be caught on one of those wild rides.

Juanito turned to the card players and ended their vociferous arguments with a rumble that came deep out of his huge chest and parted the ox-yoke mustachios.

"All right, you lazy cabrónes!" he roared at them. "Turn in the bulls' seedless oxen cousins so they'll quiet down."

He turned back to me and worry came into his eyes. "You've been wise to keep out of Santa Rosa lately, Don Guillermo. Apolinar Romero and his ore thieves are bad enough. But now that your American troops did occupy Vera Cruz and kill a number of Mexicans you are in still more danger in town. You know that."

I said, "I'm no gringo. At least I've never set foot on American soil since I was born in Chihuahua."

"With your yellow hair you're gringo to these kill-crazy Mexicans. As Don Sebastian's bull breeder and overseer you're more than gringo. You're a Spaniard, too. Last summer you shot Apolinar Romero in Tony Pizza's cantina. He's been afraid to kill you up until now. After what's happened in Vera Cruz lately he won't be any more. He and his boys will riddle you the moment you enter town. Let me go."

HE WAS referring to about fifty of the miners who still hung around Santa Rosa after revolutions had forced Don Sebastian to shut down his *mina antiguo*—the ancient Galindo silver mine. They had turned *gambusinos*—Mexican slang for ore thieves who worked the deserted mine nights and pack-trained their new find of high grade over the hills to a stamp mill in Durango.

I said, "I let you go to Durango once with a message to Jim Carlysle and his wife that the ore Apolinar brought in was stolen, and you let Apolinar kill him and leave Mary a widow. No rebuke, but it happened. And you might not be safe either, now that you still work for a rich Spaniard."

"That bunch of drunken dogs," he sneered contemptuously. "Give me just three of Pancho's *Dorados* to follow me in town and I'll clean out every one of them like sheep driven out of a corral!"

I shrugged that one off, knowing Juanito actually might try that very thing. But I was more interested about

seeing for myself if anything was wrong. I felt concern and deep gratitude to a man who had lifted me from the gutters of Oro Grande after that third-rate bull had almost gutted me to death in a third-rate bull ring.

I went to where Chico, favorite of my pick of the Morgan herd, was waiting, and swung into the high-horned Mexican saddle, becoming more worried by the minute. So far we at Hacienda de Galindo had been lucky—so damned lucky it was unbelievable, the way war against Huerta, the Dictator, was flaming all over Mexico.

Most of the big battles, however, were fought along the railroads, because to the victors that meant more trains for horseless troops, their women and children, and supplies commandeered from town along the way. But for some reason Santa Rosa had been spared. General Francisco Villa had cut far to the east of us in pursuit of President Huerta's fleeing government troops. On the west the same thing had been done by General Alvaro Obregon with his big-hatted Senora cowpunchers and his tough Yaqui fighters from their home behind the peaks of Bacatete. Both circling hard in an effort to pinch off the Federals and capture or destroy them.

What added to making my sleep a series of hellish nightmares were the myriad smaller outfits of outlaws, plain bandits, and the looting Red Flaggers—renegade Yaqui Indians—prowling like vicious wolves in the vacuum left by the three armies of Francisco Villa, Alváro Obregon, and old Venustiano Carranza, the Constitutional leader himself.

We were practically cut off from all government help except for the small garrison of soldiers in Santa Rosa under command of Major Garcia. And now if Don Sebastian's coach had run into some of the human wolves prowling the countryside—

Men fighting! Some for power, some for land, some for gold. And some for loot and the most common prize of all—women.

I quartered the black Morgan gelding down the dusty road from the bull pens, following the curve of the ruts to the hacienda; a road laid out by Don Sebastian's father about sixty years before. Flocks of parrots squawked in the green tops of the palms. Here and there a small calele hawk with crested head darted by. Near an alfalfa field blue with blossoms, two girls of fifteen or so darted into a redondo brush clump and squatted down with skirts spread, giggling as I passed. Sweethearts of José Camacho and Arturo Felix, part of the vaquero guard cordon scattered all over the surrounding area. Weddings pretty soon, I thought.

Padre Leonardo padded out of the church to shoo away a mob of yelling urchins having it out in an improvised game of *besibol.* It was always either baseball or simulated bull fighting or "troops" of the government against the *revoltosos.* Around the fortresslike manor house, which itself was one hundred yards in length, adobe cabins cut a long circular street, brown and dusty. Back of them were the big store, corn mill, slaughter house, tannery, the smithy to care for Morgan hoofs and ox-cart wheels.

A VILLAGE unto itself, Hacienda de Galindo. Over two hundred people—a whole world to many who had been born there.

I rode past a big palm, then pulled up sharp and looked down at Arturo Felix and José Camacho, Juanito's young brother. Both were on guard with rifles, but both were flat on their backs with hats pulled over their faces. Neither woke up as I swung down and walked over with my big Spanish spurs clanking.

I didn't like the looks of young José's face even in the repose of slumber. He'd run away the year before with a half-Yaqui named Maldito and fought a month with Obregon. It had taken just that short a time for him to get his guts full of fighting, but he had come back

swaggering; tough and arrogant toward everybody, including his own brother.

I bent, got a good grip on two cotton shirt fronts, and straightened with a hard surge of my forearms. The two sleepers came erect, blinking and startled at first, then they stood there sullenly while I held that grip on their shirt fronts . José tried to sneer.

"I know," I said harshly. "You played around with your girls until midnight, and now you want to sleep all day. I ought to break your stupid necks, you lazy young pups."

José managed the sneer as he tried to break my grip on his shirt. "Why don't you try it, gringo, now that any Mexican can shoot you without fear of punishment?" he asked. He knew that in five years on the hacienda I'd never struck a peon. I had, in fact, slapped all hell out of a neighbor, strutting young Don Carlos Martinez, for that offense.

I let go of Arturo, holding on to José with my left hand. I said, "I should let Juanito do this, but I'll give you some of it until he gets back."

Then I began to backhand him across his dark young face. Pain went through my knuckles and I saw shocked surprise as the arrogance faded. And when I flung him back a step I saw cold hatred in that dark face.

"Why don't you try shooting me when I get back on my horse?" I asked. "If I ever again catch you asleep on guard until this revolution is over you'll never wake up—neither of you! I'll pistol you through the head while you sleep. What do you think would happen to you—to your girls and the other women—if some bandit outfit rode in here for women and loot and found you flat on your backs with hats over your faces? They'd shoot your lazy guts out while you snored and take the women by force!"

I swung into the saddle once more. My face, reflected in the saucer-sized mirror fastened in place on top of the high Mexican saddle-horn, didn't look any uglier than it naturally was. I left José fingering his rifle, his features black with youthful rage and humiliation. He wanted to shoot, but he wouldn't. One month fighting with Obregon's army had left its mark. Six months I wouldn't have turned my back on him.

II

OLD Juan Pablo, my personal servant for five years now, came padding silently from the cool shade of one of the basalt arches along the hundred yard length of the manor house's east side as I rode up. He had been waiting. He always waited. Now, with a hand minus the index finger, he held the bit chains of the gentle Chico and stood impassively while I dutifully clanked the big Spanish spurs to the ground.

"No word of *el patron* and the buyer of bulls?" I asked.

"The trains did not arrive in Santa Rosa, Don Guillermo."

"And how do you come by these things, old one?"

"The Señorita Torcuata. She came even now, riding with the speed of the wind on a horse wet with sweat." He looked up into my face, a white-headed old patriarch born on the hacienda sixty years before, and said with a touch of sadness for one beyond redemption, "Alone. As usual."

I felt the familiar, futile surge of anger again. Time after time I had importuned Don Sebastian to put a stop to Torcuata's wild rides, trying to impress on him the fact that all Federal armies had been driven southward past us on the retreat to Mexico City, leaving us in wide-open bandit country. But the old man had shrugged it off over his glass of Oporto wine. Why bother? The people of the hacienda were in no danger. Huerta was finished. Carranza would go in as new President. The fighting would stop, as it always did immediately after a change of government, and things would go along exactly as they had before.

As for Torcuata, had anybody but

me asked her she might have listened and at least used the guards I'd provided in town—six of them to accompany her on those rides between town and hacienda. But she wouldn't listen to me. She hated me.

She hated all men and had since two nights before she was to have been married to Don Carlos Martinez when, believing she was the servant girl he'd ordered to wait for him in a dark room, he had found her instead, and had ripped her clothes off before discovering that the "servant girl" was his bride-to-be, waiting there in cold anger for his arrival.

And now she'd made that ride alone again, partly to spite me.

I thought bitterly that the showdown was long overdue, and that it might as well be now. I said to Juan Pablo, "Where is the señorita? In her apartments upstairs?"

He placed a gentle hand on my arm. "Later. There is someone here to see you."

"Who?"

"That." He sniffed, and pointed.

I turned. A man slouching against the next arch shoved a muscular shoulder away from it and dropped a cigarette husk. An Indian. As he moved toward me, something in his face was vaguely familiar for a brief moment, but was as quickly forgotten when I saw the band of red cloth around the cone of his palm-leaf straw hat.

Just an ordinary-looking Indian in leather sandals, cotton pants and shirt, straw hat and dirty gray blanket flung carelessly over one shoulder. Another dirty, hungry Indian begging food at one of the haciendas—like hell he was!

He came closer and only then did I recognize him. He didn't offer to shake hands. Neither did I. He said in Spanish. "I have come as a friend to talk as a friend."

"How the hell did you get through the guards, Maldito?" I demanded.

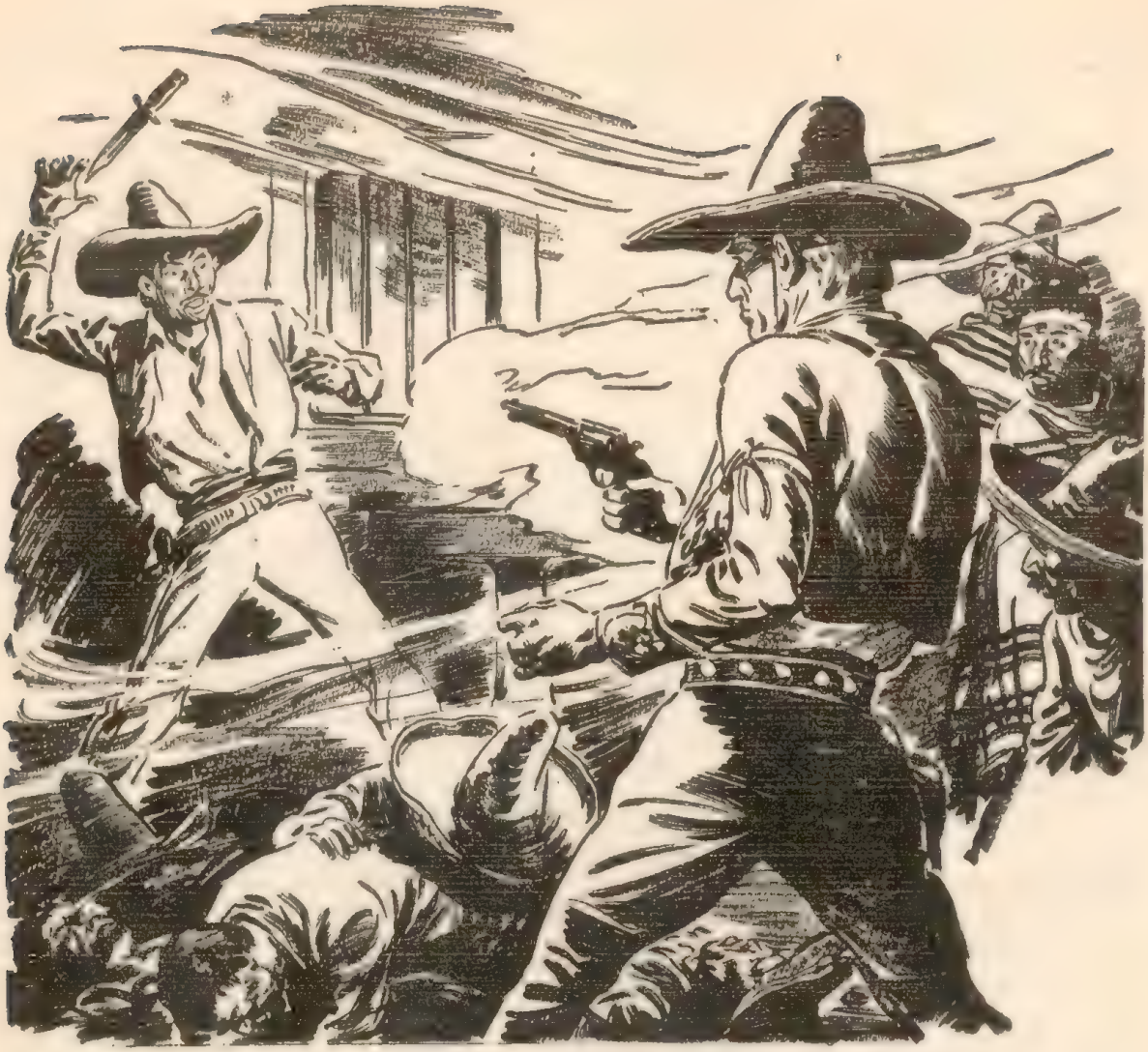
He shrugged and the shrug was the blood of his Mexican father coming to the fore. "I'm half Yaqui and a soldier, Guillermo. You remember me and Apolinar Romero in Santa Rosa last summer, eh?"

I remembered him in Santa Rosa all right. I would have remembered even if Juanito had not so recently reminded me of that episode in Tony Pizza's cantina. It had been during a time when Pancho Villa and Obregon had stopped fighting the Federals long enough to take a few slugs at each other. To the ore thieves who hung out in that cantina Villa was a great patriot, and Obregon was a leader of the hated Yaquis.

I'D BEEN in the mine for hours trying to catch the ore thieves at work, my new tipster having been found in an alley with his throat cut. So I'd stopped in Tony's that night for a drink, and there in the big smoke-filled room the drunken *gambusinos* had something down on the floor, stomping it hard. Something with a face all covered with blood, and turning pulpy.

Leaning against the bar was big Apolinar Romero, laughing hard. Tony Pizza stood back of what was going on, a calm-eyed man whose features indicated that somewhere along the line an early day Italian adventurer had loved a pretty Mexican girl. Off to one side stood Maria, Tony's lush seventeen-year-old daughter, who by night helped her father when business was brisk, and who by day worked as a personal servant in Don Sebastian's big household.

I'd moved in on the group. These men hated our boys, because the boys still worked bulls and horses and cattle and the fields for Don Sebastian; and good Mexicans didn't work for a rich Spaniard during this revolution. But ever since I had shot and killed two of Don Carlos Martinez's men, and also killed five more of his hired ambushers, the *gambusinos* had been a bit cautious about ganging up on one of my boys. I couldn't believe this victim of theirs was one of them, but I wanted to be sure, so I shoved through and looked down.



The knife fell from Apolinar's fingers as I spun and fired

Nope, not one of mine. A stranger—a stalwart one with distinctly Yaqui features. Blood gushed from his mouth and nose and from a cut over his left eye. His left jawbone didn't look right. And I could imagine the condition his ribs and guts were in.

Just another dirty Indian being stomped to death at a time when a man's life or a woman's body wasn't worth a centavo.

Apolinar Romero let go with another burst of laughter, at me this time, and I guess that did it. The mud on my boots. Collected in tramping two miles in deserted tunnels. My tipster lying in an alley with his throat gaping wide. I waded in on the pack. The barrel of my .45 began a *thud-thud* tattoo on greasy black heads.

I had five of them down when young Maria screamed a warning.

I spun. Apolinar's right arm with the long-bladed throwing knife in hand already was far back over his big shoulder.

There's been a lot of talk about a .45 bullet and its shocking power, how it was designed to knock a man down no matter where you hit him. Put one in his arm and he'll spin like a top. Bust his ankle and he'll turn somersaults. Well,

something must have been a hell of a lot wrong with mine that night, because when I shot Apolinar he just grunted a bear grunt and hunkered back against the bar. The knife fell from his fingers and clattered down on top of it, to be picked up by the inscrutable Tony Pizza. With his left hand Apolinar grabbed his right shoulder and looked at me. Contemptuously. His big neck drew back and swept forward and he spat a blob of dry spittle that shot fifteen feet and landed on the muddy vamp of my boot.

He said, "You dirty gringo Spaniard. *Chingada, cabróne!*"

The literal translation of that all knew—Your mother has slept with every man she knows, you stupid he-goat.

I only said, "You won't be stealing any more high grade for a while. And if I ever catch you in that mine or out in the hills heading for Durango with a pack train I'll kill you on sight."

The man to whose rescue I had come was this half-Yaqui Maldito now before me. I had him ride ahead of me to the hacienda and Padre Leonardo's medicine kit. Four miles at a slow walk that must have been man-killing. The padre took care of him for four months. Then one day Maldito simply disappeared, taking with him José Camacho and three or four other hot bloods to fight with Obregon.

José had come back within a month, reporting that Maldito was a machine-gunner with the desert army .

MALDITO was asking me now—did I remember him and Apolinar Romero?

"Come inside, Maldito," I ordered, and led the way.

He followed without bothering to remove the palm-leaf hat with its cone-shaped crown, rolling his head around curiously to look up at the dark, shaggy animal heads mounted along both oak-paneled walls. This was the Hall of Bull Heads, each head with its own solid silver plaque engraved with name, town, date, the matador's name. All sons of Paco Negro, great herd patriarch. All with one ear missing.

Bull and man so great in combat in the ring that the matador, or killer, had been permitted by the judges to dedicate an ear.

I crossed the wide hallway to a big door on the opposite side of the manor house, and Maldito followed forty feet across the flag-stones to the three steps leading down into Don Sebastian's patio. Here *el patron* had sipped at his sweet Oporto while we played chess or talked of his great bulls of the past, none of which a third-rater such as I had been would have dared to fight.

I sat down in Don Sebastian's favorite chair. Juan Pablo's ever ready hand —that left one with the index finger missing—took my roll brim sombrero. Maldito eased himself into the chair across from me and placed carefully on the table his palm-leaf hat with that ominous red band around the cone-shaped crown. I guess he wanted to make damn certain I saw it. I did. I didn't like it either. It made chills run up and down my spine.

He was about twenty-six or so, and from his *manso* or tame Yaqui mother he had inherited a smooth skin darker than that of a Mexican, but with the particular sheen found only among the fiercely independent people along the river behind the flat-topped peaks of Bacatete.

He let his black eyes play over me again. He took in my boots and Spanish spurs, thorn-proof Coahuila leggins to above the knees, dove-gray corduroy pants, short blue bolero jacket over white shirt and black string tie. He looked at my yellow hair, and for the first time he smiled.

"Even with the yellow hair you look more like a *haciendado* than one of the rich Spaniards."

"I'm no gringo," I said. "Why did you come here wearing the mark of a Red Flagger?"

He reached for corn-shuck and *ma-*

cuche with his eyes on my American tobacco and papers. I bent forward and shoved them across the table and he picked them up with a murmured, "*Gracias.*" Polite as hell. Too damned polite.

"One night last summer," he began, his eyes on the cigarette he was building in his dark fingers, "I came to Santa Rosa as a hungry Mexican, hoping that the mines would be operating again and that I could earn money working. I was tired of fighting with General Obregon against the Federals. Tired of cold, heat, hunger, and the weight of a hot machine-gun in my hands and on my shoulders. I was tired of remembering how old Pofirio Diaz, the Dictator, had sent his trains up from Trinidad and shelled us over the peaks of Bacatete and killed my mother and two sisters. I was pretty young then, but when we lit the white-plumed fires on the peaks I went down, even though I was just a child. On foot we met his cavalry—the famous Diaz Black Horse Cavalry, best Indian killers in Mexico. With worn-out guns and even bows of *garambuyo* wood and cane arrows we fought them bitterly, but you know what happened. They slaughtered us and drove us into the wild country of the Sierra Madre Mountains and took our rich river lands. Diaz opened them to you gringos for the gringo gold you paid—"

"I told you once before, Maldito," I cut in on him sharply and with a warning in the words, "that I'm no gringo. I was born in Colonia Juarez and Colonia Diaz in Chihuahua, settlements of Mormon people who had fled from persecution."

But I was becoming more uneasy by the moment. As a tough, experienced gunner with General Obregon, who hated the Red Flaggers, Maldito had known the risk involved in coming to me wearing a red hat-band. I might have shot him dead on sight.

HE HAD come in anyhow, alone, and I didn't like it a damned bit.

He lit the cigarette carefully as Juan Pablo came back from the nearby alcohol burner with coffee the old fellow always had hot and ready for me. The old mozo's gray head dipped, his spine stiff, as he placed the two cups on the table before *me* and then, dark face as stony as a basalt wall, stalked stiffly away.

He wouldn't serve a Yaqui Indian.

Maldito's gaze flicked at the rigid back and, briefly, venom flared but as quickly faded from the opaque black eyes his mother's Yaqui womb had brought forth. The rigid caste system again.

From aristocratic Spaniard down to Mexican, or half-Spaniard, down to a peon, and from there to a Yaqui Indian.

He pulled hard on the cigarette and the paper's brown length raced back toward his thinned lips. He might have been born of a Mexican father and lived part of his life on a small corn-bean patch until Diaz's government surveyors took it away and added it to the vast holdings of some favored politico or general or *haciendado.*

But this was no Mexican talking now. This was a pure-blood Yaqui with the fires of gall and bitterness and injustice eating away at his brain.

"So," he finished, and flicked ashes from his cigarette, "a few nights ago Pluma Colorada, one of our leaders, called a meeting of the men and then lit two fires on the peaks of Bacatete."

III

THAT cold feeling chilling my spine, my cigarette now forgotten, I knew that I'd suspected this from the beginning. Hacienda de Galindo's good luck had finally run out with a crash!

Two fires. Nothing wrong with that, oh nothing at all! Two fires of sea driftwood brought from the west coast by Yaqui pearl divers; blue by night and white-plumed by day. I could almost hear the *tamborcitos*—young drummers—begin the rolling cadences on pigskin

drums with signals known only to Yaqui ears:

"The Chief! The Chief! Listen to the orders of Pluma Colorada!"

Two fires at night. Did you see them, you down there on the desert below? Two hundred of us are coming down the Pass of Withered Hands. Nail more hands to a cactus. Cry viva!

No, they weren't coming down to join Obregon and fight against the government. Not this time. They were out for food and guns and loot and women! And the first place they headed for was Hacienda de Galindo!

"Anyhow," Maldito said and rose to his feet, the coffee Juan Pablo had refused to serve untouched, "I came on in ahead to pay a debt to you for what you did for me. This place is surrounded. You are the only one on it who will be allowed to leave unmolested. But we want Don Sebastian and any members of his family. He was a Pofirio Diaz general when the old Dictator shelled us over the tops of Bacatete and then cut us to pieces with the Black Horse Cavalry."

"He's not here," I said quickly, and with a silent prayer of thankfulness that I'd finally persuaded him to move into town under protection of the garrison. "And he was only a Quartermaster General of Supply," I added defensively.

Maldito put on the hat and slung his blanket over one shoulder. "Yes," he agreed softly. "He brought up the cannons and the mule teams to drag them. He brought up the horses and men of the Black Horse killers. We burned five bridges ahead of his trains, but he threw shoo-flies around them and came right on. Leave this place, Guillermo. Right now. Because if you refuse an offer of freedom you'll be a dead man when Pluma Colorada gets here."

"All right, Maldito," I told him, and meant it.

Then I heard the rapid footsteps along the long expanse of flag-stones running the three hundred foot length of the manor house's west side. I knew before I got up and turned. Torcuata! I had forgotten.

Pluma Colorada's surrounding outguards had let her ride through—and closed the death trap!

She wore dark gaucho trousers baggily down over the tops of soft black boots and a black blouse of pure Chinese silk. Her white throat couldn't be called pure Castilian. An arrogant, determined face was beneath the black braids coiled around her head. She'd been beautiful even at fifteen, five years ago when I'd first arrived, and now she was the loveliest thing a man would want to look at. Lovely—and as cold and hard as a piece of jade.

Five years, I thought.

No arrogance then, no bitterness and hatred of men and of the people of Santa Rosa. Just a big-eyed kid who flirted outrageously with me at every opportunity. In the chapel, along the wide, long corridors of the manor, and especially when her fat dueña dozed.

Flirtations are the life-blood of kids such as she had been, born to graduate from convent school, to the care of her dueña, to the bed of a suitable man chosen by her parents. Somebody like young Don Carlos Martinez, for instance.

I could still wince a bit even now when I thought of it.

I knew Don Carlos better than any one in the hacienda did.

His butt-stretching strut could be overlooked, as could his colossal vanity, which was matched only by his ignorance. So could his cruel horsemanship and the penchant for young Mexican girls—all supposed to be the mark of a true Spaniard aristocrat. After all, señor, should not a man acquire experience to carry to the bed of a virgin bride?

NO, WHAT got our guts roiling happened shortly after I came to the hacienda when, up by the bull pens, he struck one of my docile peons in the face

with a shot-tipped quirt. I called his hand on it and he called me a peon gringo son of a bitch. That was his second mistake. I pulled him out of the saddle and back-handed him until the ox-yoke mustachios which made him look so ridiculous lost the famous Porfirio Diaz upsweep and ended all awry.

He never mentioned the matter either to his family or to the Galindos. But during the next eighteen months five different vaqueros hired to ambush me just didn't make it. Neither did the two others in a cantina in Oro Grande, eighty miles south. Over their bodies and from back of my six-shooter I gave him a final warning and he took it.

After the servant girl episode two nights before the wedding which was never celebrated, he'd disappeared, swallowed up in the revolution, and Torcuata had been secluded for several months. But the buzz of whispers never died down. She was now *sin verguenza* —without shame—it was whispered breathlessly. No more dueña. No more walking in the plaza and flirting, the boys walking clockwise with notes of undying love hidden in their hands, the girls walking counter-clockwise.

So I hadn't blamed her when she'd started riding through the streets on one of the big Morgans from the town house stables, riding hard like a man, and throwing defiance at those who whispered. Her two step-brothers by Don Sebastian's first wife had been killed by Villa's troops in the Juarez fight four years before. Her three real brothers had been killed by Villa's nine thousand troops in the famous three-day battle for Gomez Palacio, gateway to Toereon. And, following the Don Carlos Martinez disgrace, her mother had fled to Mexico City and refused to return. Suspected of keeping a young lover.

So I hadn't blamed Torcuata until she began to whip the servant girls in the kitchen, and I'd had to take the quirt from her. After that—

Five years now, I thought.

She stopped now at the entrance to the patio and laid a slim hand on the basalt rail.

"Well, gringo," she demanded, "I came here expecting to find you filled with anger at me, but you seem to be enjoying yourself." It had been a long time since she had called me Guillermo, William, or "Beelie." "I came to tell you that yesterday the bandit army of that murderous Pancho Villa drove our government forces out of Oro Grande eighty miles from here and cut the railroad to Mexico City. That was why the impresario did not arrive. That bandit opened the telegraph this morning and flashed the news, then closed it again."

"What does Don Sebastian say?" I asked.

"He says there is no cause for worry, any more than when the government has changed hands other times in the past. He's a former general of the Diaz armies and he knows these things. Villa will drive the Federals on southward and that will be all there is to it."

"And you came all the way to tell me that, riding alone without escort?" I demanded angrily.

"I don't need an escort!" she flashed back just as angrily. "I can outrun any bandit that ever rode a horse."

I didn't make an answer to that one. I was too angry and disgusted for the moment. It was Don Sebastian I was thinking of—the man who had pulled me up when I was down with a ripped-open belly, my fighting nerve and poise in the bull ring a thing of the past. I thought, Villa will take all the trains between here and Oro Grande. If he comes up after them, then God help Don Sebastian. He's more than a rich Spaniard of the kind Pancho Villa hates. He's Santa Rosa itself.

"Look here, Torcuata," I said bluntly. "your father's life is in great danger. He must be taken away in the coach. I'll have a fresh horse saddled for you and we'll try to get through at once."

"You wouldn't dare enter Santa Rosa now," she challenged mockingly. "Re-

member how Mexicans are killing gringos since the invasion at Vera Cruz? Have you forgotten Apolinar Romero and his ore thieves? They'll kill you on sight!"

I SAID impatiently to Maldito, who was standing silently waiting, "I'd rather risk trying to get her through than to leave her here."

He shrugged, and said nothing.

That seemed to infuriate her. She stamped a foot. "Well, gringo," she hurled at me, "does it mean nothing to you that our President Huerta has broken off diplomatic relations with the Americans and sent your Chargé d'Affaires O'Shaughnessy home? These things Don Sebastian explained to me this morning."

"I'm not interested in the Americans or Apolinar and his boys," I said. "This man here has brought a message of much concern. Two hundred Yaquis are getting ready to move in on the hacienda."

She came down the three steps to the stone floor of the patio beside me, looking at Maldito, but not remembering him from a year ago. Maybe she hadn't noticed the red band, or if she had, she hadn't grasped its full significance.

"Two hundred Yaquis, dirty and hungry," she said. "But never too dirty and hungry to fight the government. Tie him up and send a fast rider to Major Garcia. Tell him to bring his troops and chase these dogs back into the hills. Then have him put this one against a wall. Or are you too much of a coward to shoot him here on the spot?"

It was hard to understand how much hatred for her and what she represented could be in Maldito's smoldering black eyes, and his voice still be so patient when he spoke to me. "I'm almost due back now, Guillermo. If I don't return by a certain time Pluma Colorada's men will deal out harsh justice to those you leave behind. I think you're a fool to risk certain death for such a woman, but that choice is yours. We'll come in and take what we need from the store and kill some cattle for food. We're very hungry."

"Kill all the steers and oxen you want, Maldito," I told him quickly.

He smiled that half-smile and shook his head. "Not steers, Guillermo. Bulls. Sleek black *Piedras Negras* fighting bulls from the man who hauled the cannons that shelled us over Bacatete. We've already killed your horse herd guards and mounted about two hundred of General Galindo's fine Morgans."

I heard the hissing of Torcuata's breath mingle with the swish of her gaucho trousers. The heavy pistol at my right hip was pulled free of the sheath and I spun and grabbed for it—almost too late. The .45 I'd used on Apolinor Romero's shoulder to protect Maldito from being stamped to death sounded as loud as when the big leader of the ore thieves had received the slug with his back up against Tony Pizza's bar. It gave off one hell of a roar as it exploded. This slug struck the flagstones beside Maldito's sandaled feet and ricocheted away into the bright noon sky, wheezing as it droned off.

Torcuata fought me as savagely as she had fought her bride-groom-to-be that night when she had taken the servant girl's place and waited in the darkness to scratch his face, then denounce him. I had to struggle a bit to get a good grip that wouldn't mar her white wrists, holding the muzzle of the Colt down aslant and away from the quiet Yaqui.

IV

AS I broke the weapon free a babel of voices began to chorus excitedly all over the place. José and Arturo put in appearance at a trot.

Torcuata fell back panting. I saw the passionate rise and fall of her rounded bosom. Her eyes were purple fire, blazing in uncontrolled fury. An entirely new experience for her, this, and Torcuata didn't like it at all.

"Get that Indian dog out of here!" she screamed, and I had to block her with an arm across her breasts. "Round up all the men, even the field workers! Hurry them here to hold this manor. No Yaqui looters' dirty feet will ever desecrate the ancestral home of General Don Sebastian Galindo! Where are all the guards you were supposed to have around here, gringo?"

She had not yet comprehended fully that Maldito had come to warn *me*, that she herself was now in immediate danger. I looked over at Maldito for an answer.

"As I told you," he explained to me, "your herd guards looked like fighters and were killed silently with *garambuyo* bows and cane arrows in the hands of the *Sin Ropa* broncos. All the others either fled into the hills or into the cornfields out yonder. All except one. A big fat toad of a man riding hard in the direction of Santa Rosa, presumably to get the Federal troops we know are there. But he won't get far. The outguards surrounding this place are veterans who fought under Obregon, and some *Sin Ropa* broncos out for the first time."

Sin Ropa, as I knew,, means "without clothing—the breech-clouted broncos or wild ones.

The big man was, of course, Juanito. Burning the breeze for help and probably getting himself killed while his brother José strode forward now and shook hands eagerly with Maldito. Turning Red Flagger on the place where he had been born.

José grinned and said, "I want to go with you again, Maldito, because this time things will be different. Lots of looting and women and not much fighting. You know something? Don Sebastian has a big pile of gold in a big iron box upstairs, because my foolish and stupid brother Juanito now riding for help has seen it. We'll get it, eh?"

[*Turn page*]

oh-oh, Dry Scalp!

"... **IMAGINE ME** dancing with a scarecrow! How can he be so careless about his hair? It's straggly, unkempt, and . . . Oh-oh—loose dandruff! He's got Dry Scalp, all right. He needs 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic."

Hair looks better... scalp feels better... when you check Dry Scalp

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I had my gun out in a flash and made him and Arturo toss aside the rifles. Anybody else but Juanito's brother and I'd have executed them both on the spot. I could only hope that I would not regret having spared them.

Lord, but we were in a fix! Juanito riding for the only help available and bucking a line of outriders who probably would cut him down. Torcuata facing death and worse at the hands of men filled with hatred because her father had helped to destroy their kinsmen. Two hundred prized Morgans gone. Ten Piedras Negras fighting bulls in lanky Yaqui bellies. Don Sebastian's ancient family gold chest.

It was thought of those bulls which, somehow, really hurt at a time when I should have been thinking about my own scalp and how to get Torcuata out of there. That's the way it gets your blood when you've been first a matador and then a breeder. Months of daily watching by the bull handlers to see which cow old Paco Negro mounted and rammed home the seminal charge. The exact day and hour, the cow's record for charging the picador lance—four years of grooming for the big and only day in the life of a Spanish fighting bull.

And now I could picture twenty lean-bellied, hungry Yaquis festooned around one of the carcasses, bent over and slicing out huge chunks of warm, dripping meat with long-bladed knives that could slit a man's feet along the soles or remove his hands at the wrists. Six minutes later and nothing left but a pair of beautifully matched black horns, and the bones, and some Piedras Negras guts.

Hacienda de Galindo's luck had held out longer than many others less fortunate. But it now looked as though we were about to make up for quite a chunk of lost time.

MALDITO stirred and shifted his blanket, and those two squirts behind him stirred, too. Twenty years old, one month of war that had chilled their spines, and now hell bent for loot and women.

Maldito said to me, again shifting his blanket in preparation for leaving, "My debt to you is paid while those two hundred hungry, ragged ones wait. So for the last time, leave here at once and alone. If you take that Spaniard woman with you you'll never get through alive." He added significantly. "Either of you."

"I'm staying here, you filthy dog," Torcuata shot back at him passionately.

I had to get hold of her again, and just as I did Padre Leonardo arrived at a trot, followed by a stream of women and children and barking dogs.

No man have I ever known did I admire more than I did the padre. He was a tall, graying man in his late fifties, with a close haircut that somehow added great dignity to his commanding stature. During the five years Hacienda de Galindo had been my home he had been as much a part of it as the manor house itself.

A hundred Sunday mornings I'd heard the sweet sound of his church bell and watched the peons begin to gather, some having walked five miles from pueblos on the great holdings. Vaqueros and bull handlers and field tillers, their women and girls in clean black clothes.

A hundred nights you could have seen his lean, robed figure, lantern swing, rustling swiftly through the darkness of the street to a distant adobe cabin where solemn-faced family and friends sat around a sick bed and awaited the moment when his dark figure stooped to enter a low doorway. Everything was going to be all right now. The padre had come.

A half-hundred other times I'd sat in the church with the Galindo family, with Torcuata's small white hand often stealing into mine, and listened to him intone High Mass for the dead while the eyes of a couple of hundred more of the humble ones rested upon a plain wooden coffin.

Another of the aged ones gone. A child that had stepped on a rattlesnake.

A young peon wife in her teens whose pelvis had been unable to spread wide enough to relieve the burden of a swollen stomach. And, occasionally, a youth with the once flaming mezcal now cold in his veins, face covered to conceal the deep knife cuts.

Padre Leonardo rustled hurriedly down the three stone steps and I released my grip on Torcuata. She wouldn't fight now. He was the one person who could do anything with her, if anybody at all could, since the night of the big disgrace two days before her planned wedding.

"What is all this, child?" he asked her. "I heard a shot. Is anything wrong?"

He listened gravely while with flashing eyes she told him, the soft Spanish syllables pouring out in a passionate torrent. "And now this gringo, whose own life is no longer safe anywhere in Mexico, refuses to stay here and fight these dogs," she finished.

"It is not his duty, and they are not dogs," the padre told her. "Isn't it enough that he would risk his life to get you out of something you never should have been in in the first place? Listen, child, these are bad times when men's brains are inflamed and they cannot think and see clearly as they once did, and some day shall do again. I've viewed with increasing alarm the risks you have so needlessly been taking by riding alone, and have prayed in sadness because you ignored my admonitions when you broke your promises. And now see how foolish and wrong you have been. Juan Pablo will have a horse saddled for you at once."

"What about you, Padre Leonardo?" I broke in. "You're Spaniard, too, and churches are prime targets for men hunting loot."

"I'm also a man of God with a duty before me. That duty is here where they need me, and those who come are welcome to what little of value is to be found."

I looked at Maldito and asked a question. "What's the attitude of this Red Flag leader of yours toward the padre?"

THAT shrug again; almost carelessly. "Our leader is much like Pancho Villa. Unpredictable. Easygoing one minute and murderous the next. If that gold is upstairs, as José says, the church probably won't be bothered. The trouble is, Guillermo, that some of those men waiting out there on the Morgans are *Sin Ropa* broncos out for the first time and have itchy bow-strings. So you better tell him to get the hell out of here to his church and stay inside it. It won't do him any good if one of them gets out of hand and puts a cane arrow into his robe. I'm grateful to you, Padre, for what you did for me after the *gambusinos* stomped in my face and ribs. But don't run around outside."

He moved past Padre Leonardo, followed by the two smirking young vaqueros. Nearly one hundred women and children, standing in frozen silence, fell back to open a path for them. Maldito's rawhide sandals made peculiar scuffing sounds on the flag-stones as he went back to the doorway of the Hall of Bull Heads and through to the other side past where he had waited for me.

Padre Leonardo turned and spoke to the women, his calm voice carrying a note of reassurance. "I'll ring the bell of the church and call in your men. There must be no panic. These men are hungry, and are friends of the poor. You women and children will wait for me inside the church." He turned to Torcuata. "And now, my child, you will leave at once with Don Guillermo. You did a terrible thing just now and I shake my head in shame as I realize you cannot remain here. I place you in Don Guillermo's hands."

"Of course, Padre," she murmured meekly. Just a little too meekly, I thought.

I went with Juan Pablo to the corrals, the old mozo riding Torcuata's sweat-drenched mount which she had left, reins dangling, at the south entrance to

the manor. The mozo didn't have to glance at me to reveal the fear inside of him, the dread of a hard ride of the kind he wasn't used to. If he remained behind and tried to hide he'd probably get his feet slit for refusing to serve coffee to a Yaqui. If Padre Leonardo tried to help, anything might happen to the women and girls.

From the dozen or so Morgans we always kept in readiness I saddled a fresh one for Torcuata and another for Juan Pablo.

"My hands are good for serving you, Don Guillermo," he finally spoke up. "But the years have been long since I have ridden hard."

I told him that Maldito might have been bluffing to keep anyone from trying to escape, that we'd make it through. He nodded and we rode back to the south entrance. But it was no bluff. Those outguards were there around us all right.

No laughing women and girls in the kitchen patio now. They were in small groups, whispering nervously, while the children, with youngsters' instinct for knowing when something is wrong, huddled around their skirts in silence. Others were hurrying to their homes along the wide arc of the street to hide what pitifully few valuables they possessed. A gold earring; a small statue of Our Lady of the Guadalupe; a *rebozo* head shawl of fine Spanish lace.

I left Juan Pablo with the horses and went into the long, cool hallway, and somehow it seemed as though my spurs on the stone floor made deep and gloomy sounds that echoed from ahead where Paco Negro's sons looked down from the walls. It was as though I were walking along these broad corridors for the last time and wanted to record that familiar ring of big spur rowels on stone.

One pair alone now in the sepulchral silence soon to be broken by two hundred or more, mingled with the scuff of rawhide-soled sandals.

Don Sebastian's big office was on the upper floor on the east side, where he could sit and look out the window past the palm tops toward the corrals of his beloved bulls a quarter-mile upslope. I climbed the stairs and entered his office. I took one look and cursed Torcuata.

HIS IRON strong-box, as large as a big trunk, was open, the lid back as though flung by an angry hand. It was empty. How she had done it in twenty minutes I had no way of knowing. But gone were more than two hundred pounds of small gold bars and a hoarded collection of old family coins. French louis d'ors, Spanish doubloons, American eagles and double eagles, Dutch guilders and Mexican pesos, and a big pile of Mexican silver coins.

It had all been hidden away somewhere by Torcuata and some of the servants. So had the deeds and documents and survey reports pertaining to much of the hacienda land Pofirio Diaz had taken from the peons and given to a faithful general, forcing the former owners to starve or go to work for the new owner. It had been a Diaz form of slavery considered fitting for lazy, shiftless sub-humans good only for work. Give them credit at the hacienda store, get them in debt, and keep them there until they died, then pass the debt on to the sons.

As a former general, Don Sebastian had politely accepted the additional land containing four or five small pueblos. He had been a good *patron*, far above the average in generosity. But the *revoltosos* had a way of burning all land records and other documents while raiding a hacienda, and Torcuata had known it. She'd taken the records.

V

WHEN I strode along the wide upstairs corridor to my own quarters, Torcuata was leaning in the doorway of her elaborate apartments. Along this corridor an untold number of times she had flashed past me at a run, darting those eager amethyst eyes up mischievously;

walking sedately with lashes downcast when the rotund dueña waddled beside her.

The eyes were mocking now as I strode by.

I said, "I don't know where you hid it and care less. I hope only that the servants who helped you aren't tortured. Get ready to ride. I'll be right back."

"Don't bother, gringo," she called after me. "I'm not going."

I answered with a short grunt and went on down to the rooms that had been my home since that fateful day in the bull ring in Oro Grande, five years ago. Peaceful, prosperous, contented years. I stood for a few moments and looked at the pictures and old guns and bows and arrows on the walls. Chamaco and Kino, two more of Paco Negro's one-eared sons, seemed to look down accusingly as I prepared to take leave.

My many books the Yaquis wouldn't bother with unless to make fires in the big fireplace while they squatted on sinewy haunches and roasted bull meat on the hearth. My beautiful *charro* outfits for holidays and other celebrations would have to be left behind. I could almost see some *Sin Ropa* bronco stripping off his breech clout to nakedness and putting on silver trimmed pantaloons with wide. flaring leg bottoms, then adding a bolero jacket and a sombrero adorned with gold lace with solid silver spurs on his rawhide sandals—he'd automatically be a *Sin Ropa* no longer but a *manso* tame one.

Well, stranger things had happened in Mexico that summer!

From a bureau drawer I removed an extra gunbelt and filled sheath, unwrapped them, and slung them around my left hip, following with crisscrossed bandoliers of .40-82 cartridges over both shoulders. They weighed about a ton. I'd bought them, and the powerful binoculars, early in the revolution when Pancho Villa, tired of the haggling between Madero in exile in El Paso and representatives of Pofirio Diaz, smashed impatiently in and took Juarez anyhow and told the Diaz politicos to get the hell out or get shot.

He'd started the ball rolling over the vacillating Madero's head, an action that was to end the thirty-four year dictatorship of Mexico's Iron Man.

"Catch in the act. Kill on the spot." Such had been the orders in the infamous telegram old Dictator Diaz with the fiercely upswept mustachios had sent to his deadly Rurales. Now Huerta, with a lifetime of Indian killing behind him, was following through ruthlessly. So many bodies. desiccated and tattered, swaying in the breezes from trees and telegraph poles! So many bones whitening all over the land! And now because of the American landing in Vera Cruz the voices of the people were sending up the cry:

"We are being invaded! Kill the gringos!"

Some prescience had impelled me to secure the extra weapons and belts against the day when Don Sebastian's life might be in need of them to prevent him taking his place up there on the arm of a telegraph pole. Yet because of young Don Carlo's hatred of me for that manhandling up by the bull pens five years ago I'd needed them for my own protection.

I slung the binocular case strap over a shoulder and picked up the scabbarded .40-82 rifle that had killed five would-be ambushers, and walked down the wide corridor to Torcuata's apartment. She wasn't in the doorway now because there wasn't any doorway. It had disappeared. Facing me were four inches of iron-studded wood barred from within by a hinged iron bar. Don Sebastian's sagacious old Spaniard father had built for any and all eventualities those sixty odd years before.

I CALLED impatiently and began to pound on the wood and iron with the butt of the repeater's stock, "All right, young lady! Cut out this childish nonsense and open that door. Hurry! They may ride in at any moment."

"Go ahead and save your gringo skin," came in muffled defiance. "They won't stay long and can't get in here. I'm safe. You better hurry and flee to your gringo home in Arizona!" And she knew damned well I'd been born in Chihuahua and had never left Mexican soil in my life.

I pounded again, angrily, and above the thundering tattoo came laughter and more insults. She also knew I wouldn't leave without her.

"You won't go!" she jeered. "And I won't unbar the door! What are you going to do, gringo? Stay out there until they come up and kill you?"

I put down the gun. My big office was right down the corridor and across from that of Don Sebastian, and the doors could not be locked. In the entire place such a thing as locked doors had been unheard of. I slipped into my office, past the bulky file cases containing the precious Piedras Negras breeding records, and stepped through the open window to the west balcony above the basalt arches below. Now, damn you, I thought, as I moved toward her windows.

She sat on her huge four-poster bed with a red silk canopy over it, still laughing and calling insults at the door. She hadn't even thought to shutter and bar the windows. Hearing no reply from the corridor, she got up and went to the door and placed an ear against it.

"What's the matter, gringo?" she jeered. "Are you sulking?"

I said, "Not sulking, Torcuata. Just beginning to get damned good and mad at a foolish woman."

She whirled as I stepped over the window sill into the room. I saw the surprise in her face turn into the old hatred. It was in her amethyst eyes—the loveliest eyes in the whole of Mexico if there had been no hatred in them.

On a marble-topped bureau lay her hat, gloves, a leather bag, and a quirt. She snatched up the quirt and slashed me once across an upraised arm before I got a grip on her—and this time I wasn't worrying about bruises. I tore the quirt free and slammed her flat against the white plastered wall.

"Get your gringo hands off a Castilian woman!" she panted angrily as she struggled.

Chinese silk doesn't tear easily, but the black blouse had seams down the sides. I got hold of the buttoned front with a good grip, jerked savagely, and the whole front came away with a dry, ripping sound like old paper peeled off a wall. She sucked in her breath and began to quiver, stunned to speechlessness. She stood rigid, frozen, and quivered again when I looked down through her gauzy white chemise.

In the big house in town, Torcuata's aunt—old wine-guzzling, cigarette-smoking Tia Galindo—had a nice crop of lovely black fuzz on her upper lip, the pride of her life because it was the mark of a true Castilian lady. But there were others on the Latin skin, for no matter how white it is there are always two spots that are dark-colored. But these two I saw now were—golden!

She had jeered at me. She had insulted me. She had called me "gringo."

It was my turn now.

"Ah!" I jeered at her. "I suspected it all along. Castilian woman, are you? Who was the blond French officer in Maximilian's army of Napoleon the Third, who in the invasion of Mexico took your grandmother for his mistress?"

"That's a lie!" she whispered in a voice that was almost a whimper of broken pride now that the secret was out. "A lie! They—they were married."

THAT strange quiver went through her again and she looked up at me. She didn't struggle. Perhaps she was remembering the time when, waiting in a darkened room in place of a servant girl, she had struggled with her fiancé and had nearly known tragedy. I blotted her lips savagely with my own and felt a surge of fire roar through my brain. As I raised my face from hers she only

stood there and quivered again.

"Now I know why you struck the women in the kitchen," I snarled at her. "I know now why you ride hard and fast and alone."

"A lie—a lie!" she panted, but still didn't fight. "I won't listen!"

"You'll listen. I know now that night after night you've lain alone in the darkness of your room and stared up at the ceiling or out of a window. Hunger inside of you, the hunger of loneliness. Hunger for the things those girls down in the kitchen have and are denied you. Padding contentedly around the kitchen, waiting for a husband to come home from the day's work, and you—"

"Get out of here!" she shrieked at me. "Get out of here!"

"Will you go with me now and try to get through?"

She rolled her head from side to side in angry negation and I saw a damp glitter in the purplish sheen of her eyes. I crushed my lips down on hers again, pulled her away from the wall and brought her against me in a hold that forced all the air from her lungs. I held her until she began to whimper.

"Don't!" she finally whispered. "Please—don't! I'll go."

I pushed away from her and the internal flames were a roaring inferno that left me weak and more shaken than I had ever been in my life; spayed of a strength and conscience which, for a few mad moments, had left only a thin line dividing young Don Carlos Martinez and myself. I felt sick with a sudden miasma of the mind, but from the smoky tendrils a voice kept repeating from far away, She wanted you to do that. She wanted you to! She's not the big-eyed youngster you've always thought her. She's a woman now and she wanted you to do that!

DOLLARS AND SENSE

SOME cattlemen like a Hereford and some like an Angus. Some like a Shorthorn, but all cattlemen who are in the business like a cow that can put beef on his bones quickly and cheaply.

That is why cattlemen sent all the way to India to get Brahman bulls to put with their herds. A purebred animal is a pleasure to look at, but a crossbreed makes the dollars jingle in the rancher's pockets.

One rancher who had a herd of fine thoroughbred Herefords worked out the fact and suddenly threw a bunch of Brahman bulls into his purebred herd. When asked why he should dilute that fine blood he gave the clearest answer to the question of Brahmans that could be given.

He said, "A two-year old steer with three-eighths Brahman blood in him will average weighing 85 pounds more than a purebred from then on out in any season of the year. He will finish off on commercial feed in a feedlot 25 days faster than a purebred animal. A Brahman cow with a calf by her side will walk ten miles for water without injury to the calf and without neglecting to drink. She can stand any amount of heat, and will be grazing and putting on beef while a purebred has gone to the shade to lie down and lose weight. And you never have to treat them for screwworms, Screwworms don't like Brahman blood."

Any cow that will graze while other cows are lying in the shade will outweigh the other cows. Any cow that will walk ten miles for a drink instead of losing weight by going thirsty rather than walk to water will outweigh a cow that won't make the trip. Any cow that will fatten out on 25 days less feeding of bought feed is a profitable animal. And any animal that will outgrow another animal of its own age by eighty-five pounds is an animal that a rancher cannot afford to be without.

So, "Old Humpy" might not be so pretty to look at, but he means dinero in the pockets of the ranchers, and he is therefore settled in the Southwest for keeps.

—Allan K. Echols

I discovered that my hands were trembling.

She straightened away from the wall and her hands, covering her breasts, were trembling like mine. She crossed the room to a clothes closet half as big as a regular room, took down another blouse, slipped it on and buttoned up the front.

She said, without emotion. "Twice in my life men of lust have tried to desecrate me. First Don Carlos Martinez and now you, two of a kind. Today may be the end of the only kind of life I have ever known. I do not know. But of one thing I am certain, Guillermo. If the time ever comes when I have an opportunity to repay in some kind of bitter coin, that account to you and Don Carlos Martinez will be settled in full."

She placed a hand on the belt buckle of the gaucho trousers. "Now please turn your back and unbar the door while I finish dressing. I already have the land deeds ready to take to Don Sebastian in Santa Rosa. I was only worrying you by barring the door. I never had any intention of remaining here until the Yaquis arrive."

When we came out of the manor house down into the sunshine the deep, mellow tones of the call bell from the campanile of the church were signaling the emergency far and wide over field and pasture. Little groups of women and children watched in numb silence while I tied the rifle scabbard beneath left saddle skirt, stock forward, stirruped into the high horned Mexican saddle, and reined over beside Torcuata.

They knew, those humble ones. They were being left to the mercy of the invaders while we ran to save our precious skins. Like the *ricos* always fled. Nor was there anything I could do at the moment to make them undersatnd.

Their own inner thoughts were put into words by stooped, wrinkle-faced, aged Salvadore Dominguez, who kept repeating bewilderdly to his married daughter, Florenza, "Where is *el patron?* The bad ones are coming and he is not here. Why does he not come and tell them to go away?"

Why not indeed?

JUST this once I was glad about the lack of a telephone. I knew Don Sebastian too well. At a word the old former general would have come roaring out of town like Paco Negro going with head lowered for one of the other bulls.

I said to Torcuata. "They don't understand and I can't explain now. Let's get out of here fast. And if any of their blood is shed today because you hid that musty collection of coins and half smelted bullion, I hope that alive or dead you suffer for it! Where's Juan Pablo?"

"Was he supposed to leave while the others remain behind?" she demanded icily. "Because he is your personal manservant?"

"Of course he was supposed to leave," I said harshly. "I wouldn't dare leave him here after he refused to serve coffee to a Yaqui. He'd end up with his feet slit, being chased across the fields on horseback until he falls and they shoot him through the head!"

"Perhaps he went to the church to have Padre Leonardo hide him. He's old and unused to riding fast. I'm sure the padre can hide him well."

It was the first time in five years Juan Pablo had disobeyed an order, but it also was the first time he had faced the distinct probability of having the soles of his feet slit by a razor-edged Yaqui knife. Anyhow, I thought, Juanito is just as tough a fighter as those Indian boys out there circling the place, and if he gets through it won't take long for the soldiers to be here.

After that there would be no worries. I knew Major Garcia. He'd been trained in Europe under German instructors and, other than being madly in love with Torcuata whose father paid handsomely for the presence of the Major and his troops in Santa Rosa, was a competent officer. He could pull his two light cannons at a fast gallop and bring four

machine guns up for quick action.

I said to her again. "Let's get out of here."

We reined around and loped away southward, down the long wide lane which led to the road over the hills to Santa Rosa, four miles away. Past the horse and then sheep and goat corrals a quarter-mile below the manor house we crossed the deep sand of a dry creek bed and climbed steeply to where above us the fluted arms of the giant saguaros stood out grotesquely against the bright noon sky.

By common instinct we pulled up and swung the Morgans around. From the ridge we could look down upon the red top of the hacienda manor and the church, see the long dark mass that were riders coming in fifty abreast. I unslung the glasses. Torcuata sat taut in the saddle, the full reality of it having struck her for the first time—a blow that had gone deep. Others had suffered harshly, yes. Even the Martinez family of young Don Carlos forty miles away. Of the Madero family, one hundred and seventy-two male members had, at one time, lost all their fabulous holdings through confiscation by old Diaz.

It had happened to others, also. But the hacienda of Don Sebastian Galindo? Never!

It had.

We sat there and watched as the raiders came on at a half gallop and pulled up near the bull pens in a dark mass of Morgan horses and black-faced riders. Clearly to our ears came the rolling cadences of the pigskin drums.

Capitan! Capitan! Capitan-tan-tan! Hear the orders of Pluma Colorada!

The young *tamborcitos* astride their new, strong mounts gave a few more rolls of the small drums, then Pluma Colorado himself rode out from the rear. He wore a beautiful white sombrero of the kind I'd had in my rooms, and even at that distance I could make out the long red feather sticking up from the red band around the cone of the hat. And some unknown Federal officer had lost a white summer full dress blouse along with his life.

From the waist down Pluma Colorada wore white cotton pants and sandals like the rest of the *mansos* or tame ones. About as tame as mad pumas, I thought.

HE SHOUTED a few words in Yaqui and, in the rear, a dozen of them yipped shrilly and gleefully wheeled their Morgans toward the holding pasture fence. Rifles—captured Mausers at that!—began to *spang* and, loud and clear, we heard the agonized bellowing of dying bulls.

Ten of them! Ten *Piedras Negras*. The finest I had ever bred.

Blood gushed in foamy red streams from gaping throats, and running figures remounted. The two hundred of them loped down the curve of the road and into the wide arc of the street. They pulled up, massed almost shoulder to shoulder. Not a woman or child in sight. They were huddled inside the church, heads bowed, crosses gripped, praying.

Only aged Salvadore Dominguez waited to welcome them—with a barrage of shrill, toothless oaths.

"Out, you Indian dogs! Eater of carrion, go back before *el patron* comes and drives you—"

The sun gleamed blue on the barrel of Maldito's captured Mauser as he removed his white sombrero with the red feather, unslung the weapon, and fired. The high-powered rifle crashed only once, spitefully, and the man whose eyes had been so somber when last I'd seen them there in the patio waved to his two hundred men. Salvadore's crumpled body disappeared from view as the Yaquis swung down, swept forward, and engulfed the manor house of Hacienda de Galindo.

I lowered the glasses and handed them to Torcuata, I said, "We'll stay right here between the hacienda and the out guards as long as possible and hope that Juanito gets through to Major Garcia."

She didn't answer, merely stretched

out her hand for the binoculars, her eyes still on the fantastically unreal scene below, as though she still couldn't believe it. I did and I hoped fervently that when the Federals did arrive Major Garcia would not be forced to wheel his cannon into firing position and start lanyarding shells against the walls.

How long we sat there watching for signs of the out guards and looking down upon the swarm of excited figures below I don't know. But presently smoke began to wisp through the big doorway near Don Sebastian's private patio, and I said as gently as possible, "I think it would be best if we go now, Torcuata."

The Hall of Bull Heads was burning!

She handed back the binoculars, shook her head, choked, then dashed the back of her left hand across wet eyes. She had been born within one hundred feet of where that ominous smoke roiled through the doorways and was beginning to seep out through the south entrance of the manor house.

New sound broke in upon the excited shouts down there below us. The pigskin drums again. The rattle of them under the hands of the boy *tamborcitos* appeared to call for a hurry-up reassembly. Running figures, many with loot in their arms, came pouring out of the burning hacienda. One of them was dressed in white. I had guessed right. One of the *Sin Ropa* broncos had outfitted himself in one of my *charro* suits.

I saw Maldito point up to where we sat outlined on the ridge, heard a yell that was pure Indian.

"Come on!" I called to Torcuata and wheeled over hard. "I'd forgotten about that empty strong-box. He's found it, he's burning down the place because it was empty, and now he wants us pretty badly!"

We began to run for it—hard toward Santa Rosa where the soldiers were—the troops Juanito was racing for. The coach road led down through a low swale studded with more saguaros, crooked arms ugly and winding. And it was about then when I spotted the five or six riders ahead of us, two of them wearing no clothing except dirty white muslin breech clouts. The road curved, swung upslope at an angle, and we took it at a run. Shots began to spang out from two of the *mansos* carrying rifles.

I BENT in the saddle, jerked the .40-82 from its boot, and threw five quick shots at the group. I heard yells, saw horses being buck-jumped from sight over the lip of the slope we'd just pounded up. We had reached the top when Torcuata screamed and jerked her horse to its haunches. She pointed and screamed again.

A big saguaro with a thin streak of red running down its scaly trunk. Above the red, nailed fast, a pair of dark hands.

From the left one the index finger was missing.

Why had the old fellow disobeyed me and come on ahead alone? Panic, maybe. Or was it the knowledge that he would have been a burden because he was too old to ride hard? Maybe a deliberate sacrifice. I could never tell any more than I could have explained what quirk of conscience or honor had caused Maldito to come in ahead of his raiders and warn that the place was surrounded but that I could go unmolested. Mexican fatalism side by side with an Indian's sense of honor and gratitude.

I shoved more shells from the bandoliers into the magazine and we again settled down to a gruelling effort to break out of the trap and escape to Santa Rosa. Major Garcia, I thought, where are you?

The early-day Apaches of Sonora and Arizona had believed that you could send out thought spirits and contact a friend or an enemy if you tried hard enough. I was trying it now and I wasn't thinking about any Apaches. I was thinking that unless a miracle happened in a hurry that one William Sandrigan, Mexico born matador, bull breeder and

overseer, might have to sit, dulled with drugs, and watch his two hands being nailed to a cactus. As for what would happen to Torcuata—.

Garcia, where are you? A woman you love and hope to marry needs you badly! And a Red Flagger raider is liable to get her if you don't hurry with rifles and those four *ametralladoras* with their long belts of ammunition!

I spurred Chico alongside Torcuata's running horse over in the other rut of Don Sebastian's coach road to town.

"You've made this run many times," I yelled at her. "You know to a split hair what a Morgan can do on a four-mile run. Set the pace and hold it a little ahead of me."

I looked over my shoulder again at the dark mass of running horses. More than one hundred and fifty of them, ducking around saguaros and mesquite clumps and now and then a maguey; weaving while the dark-faced riders laid on more steel. I let the knotted reins on Chico's flying mane and twisted around in the saddle with the .40-82 gripped so tight my hands were aching. Both barrel and stock under my fingers were slick now, with the salty sweat of fear.

Cry viva! Nail more hands to the cacti!

Four hundred yards. Eighty-two grains of black powder to throw a 260-grain slug of lead almost a half-inch in diameter. I thought, If I get out of this mess with a whole hide and both hands I'll get one of those Mausers.

This gun I held hadn't been designed for accuracy at that distance, and I was astride a running horse pounding methodically down the sandy rut of a coach road with neck outstretched and mane flying. Nothing spectacular about Chico. To him it was a job to be done, and Chico was doing it the best way he knew how.

Four hundred yards. But the target was big and massed up close and I had eight in the magazine plus one in the firing chamber. I sent nine big slugs whistling back, and one or two of them must have struck horses. One went down headlong, somersaulting twice before a dozen more piled up on top of it in a tangle of dying men and mounts screaming shrilly in the agony of broken limbs. The horses limped away, and men tried to stagger to the protection of saguaro trunks.

MORE running horses blotted them from view.

They were holding their fire and I didn't have to guess twice to know why. Torcuata. Maldito wanted her, had known all along there in the patio that he'd get her within an hour or two. He didn't want her just because she was a woman and a beautiful one. He could have them by the dozen now, women who would go with him willingly.

He wanted her because she was Don Sebastian's daughter, the woman who had called him a dirty Indian dog and had tried to kill him with my pistol.

He wanted both of us, because he thought I had helped her to hide enough gold for them to buy huge supplies of guns and ammunition, food and clothing, and the cattle Yaqui stomachs always craved but never got enough of except during a revolution.

VII

PUTTING the spurs to Chico's sleek sides, I called on him for more speed. Obediently he closed the gap between himself and Torcuata's horse while I thumbed more cartridges into the magazine of the heavy repeater. We'd come about two miles now, not at a dead run because no horse that ever lived could have stood such a pace, but hard enough so that our mounts couldn't hold it much longer.

"Hit for the magueys!" I yelled to Torcuata and pointed to a half-mile sea of them off to our right and ahead. "Some of those Red Flaggers back there are carrying Mausers that will shoot a mile! They may start trying to cut us

down at any moment!"

Her taut face displayed no signs of panic. She rode that lunging Morgan with a master hand on the reins. Maybe she didn't realize fully how easily massed firepower from behind could bring us down. Maybe she was putting too much faith in the hoped-for sudden appearance of Major Garcia and his garrison of about one hundred troops.

A narrow horse trail led into the half-mile-wide sea of magueys. We hit it at a fast gallop.

In the ranching country of Mexico a maguey is hated, along with all the other agaves and cacti for what thorns and spines will do to a good horse—or to your own person unless you wear bull-snout tapaderos over the stirrups and greaved Coahuila leggins to above the knees. It is loved for its rope and liquor and razor strops and soap. But that afternoon—God, how good that big sea of green spines looked!

I was using the big repeater again, twisted around in the saddle, while Chico methodically followed Torcuata's galloping horse along the winding, sandy trail. Faintly I heard the wild cries back there as the main body of them realized they had, for the moment at least, been neatly euchred.

Some of them began to open up with those damned Mausers. The copper-jacketed bullets didn't make any sound, but I knew the range of those powerful, German-made guns and what they could drill through when a bullet went home up to a half-mile away.

Maldito was in the lead after us, followed closely by José Camacho and Arturo, and four more vaqueros we had thought were faithful to Don Sebastian. I began to lever the Winchester again. Three lucky hits out of nine this time. It sent them scattering, sheering off, taking the round-about way while Maldito and about two dozen others forged straight on through in a thin line of riders.

That way we made it through.

"Look, Beelie!" Torcuata cried out to me. "One rider coming."

One rider coming hard, all right. One lone man who saw us, jerked his horse to a halt, wheeled and began to run. Letting us catch up with him. Juanito on a fresh Morgan from the stables of the big town house.!

And now it's Beelie again, I thought.

Like hell it was! After me ripping her blouse in anger while a brief flash of fire roared through me and left my hands trembling? After her cold words of hatred? And now it was Beelie again after such a long, long time? All within an hour! If so, the paisanos weren't the only ones whose lives were undergoing swift and violent changes brought on by a war of insurrection. After today, I thought, Torcuata and I couldn't ever be the same toward each other again.

She had kindled a fire inside of me back there in her apartments, and in the brief time it had taken to light it and let it burn its flash course, the hands of a faithful, frightened old man had been severed and nailed to a saguaro tree.

It had cost a price to make it "Beelie" again, and Juan Pablo had paid that terrible price in full.

JUANITO roweled in beside me, ape-like shoulders rising and falling with the plunging motion of his horse. And the huge ends of his mustachios, too, rising and falling beneath the roll brim of the weather-beaten sombrero, I would have sworn.

"I never expected to see you alive again!" he bellowed at me. "I killed three of them fighting my way through but my horse took a cane arrow in the neck."

I bellowed a question back at him. Major Garcia and the garrison?

"Gone!" He swung hard to avoid the mesquite clump, then rode in alongside once more. "Got panicky this morning after Villa cut the railroad at Oro Grande yesterday and whipped the Federals on southward. Vamoosed about thirty minutes before I got there. Hit out to try and get through to join General Valesquez's government troops

retreating south along the railroad, and he took all the officials with him. Santa Rosa is in the hands of Apolinar Romero and his ore thieves. They're crazy drunk and roaring for Spanish and gringo blood, yours in particular."

"Where's Don Sebastian?"

"In jail with some of the other rich Spaniards. Tio and Tia Galindo are barricaded in the house with the servants and guards, and with that blonde American woman, Mary Carlysle. You remember when you sent word by me to the Ojuela Mine in Durango to tell her husband Apolinar's silver was stolen ore? Senor Carlysle wouldn't buy the next load and Apolinar killed him, remember?"

Remember? How in God's name could I ever forget? Mary and I had been raised together as kids before my grim, straight-laced father had repudiated me for turning away from farm and ranch and to the bull ring for a future. And now by an ironic twist of fate I'd sent her husband a message that had caused his violent death at Apolinar's hands and made Mary a widow.

"What do we do now?" Juanito yelled.

He was grinning, for this was old stuff to him. He loved it. A good horse and a good rifle—whoever heard of a Villa man who didn't like to fight? But what do you tell a man a few moments before you try to kill his brother? I told Juanito to follow hard after Torcuata and try to keep himself directly between her and any Yaquis firing at her.

The disgust and disappointment was plain on his big, swarthy face with its huge mustachios, but he obeyed without question. He drove on ahead to close up the gap between his own and Torcuata's galloping horse, and I hauled Chico up short. I hit the grass with the heavy gun that had been designed in 1886, just twenty-eight years before—the year I'd been born and that gun probably had poor business being in the

[*Turn page*]

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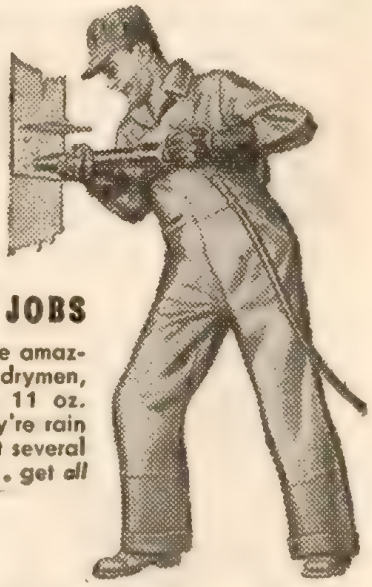

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hands of a man who perhaps in the final showdown would end up as he had ended up in the bull ring.

Third-rate. Ripped open.

But I still had eight bullets in the magazine and one more in the dirty firing chamber. And I had solid earth under my knee as I knelt and rested the sights on Maldito's horse coming in a hard spurt along the winding trail out there in the sea of magueys.

I hated to do it to the Morgan and it took five shots before I centered. Little use in trying to hit Maldito. He was humped low, riding like an Indian, and all that could be seen of him at two hundred and fifty yards was the cone of that white sombrero, though I thought he had lost the red feather from which he took his Yaqui name. If he hadn't, then Pluma Colorada damn well was about to. For I knew now that Maldito—*he* was Pluma Colorada!

I lined on the area of the horse barely above the spiked tops of the green magueys—the solid area above the pumping forelegs and below the downward slope of the lower back. It was sweat-drenched, black, and at that distance almost smaller than the front sight of the .40-82.

I LEVERED four shots and missed everything. I centered the fifth with that kind of regret any man who loved good horses would have.

The white sombrero went sailing through the air just above Maldito's flying body as the horse somersaulted. I wondered how it felt to land spread-eagled in the middle of a maguey plant.

José Camacho and the others who were strung out behind jerked their heaving horses to a halt. I still had four left in the repeater. No fighting and much loot, José had said and had licked his lips. I opened up before he could dismount to help his Yaqui leader. Four straight misses, but one of the recalcitrant vaqueros behind José wasn't so lucky. I don't think he ever knew what hit him.

Two out of nine, I thought grimly. That wasn't so bad for an old-fashioned gun. I figured that with a Mauser I could do better. Anyhow, I'd stopped them out there in the middle of the magueys, and the main body of them, cutting a long circle on horses that were about wind blown, were now more than six hundred yards away.

I got on Chico and tore out at a lope, breathing a little easier now. We'd lost out so far as help from the Federal garrison was concerned. But I could picture what would happen when Maldito and his boys rode in and found the town in the hands of the men who had stomped his face in the summer before.

Maybe, I thought hopefully, we won't be needing Major Garcia and his soldiers after all.

When entering Santa Rosa by the north road you lip the first of three ridges running east and west, then drop downslope past deserted adobe cabins and cantinas into a gully known facetiously in more quiet times as Frenchman's Pox Gulch. You clatter down the can- and bottle-littered street to where the end of the second ridge flattens out into a broad promontory shaped like a duck bill. In a three-quarter mile curve around the base of Duckbill Ridge is the business district with its plaza and a church large enough to be classified as a small cathedral.

Below the plaza is the huge town house of the Calindo family and the homes of rich businessmen and ranchers. Still farther below them are the railroad station and big ore freight yards. Don Sebastian's stamp mill and smelter had handled ore for various other mines as well as his own. Jim Carlysle had been general superintendent until war had closed the mine and forced him to go to work for Meyer Guggenheim at Ojuela in Durango.

The mine and stamp mill and smelter were all a part of the third ridge.

I lipped the first ridge and pulled up beside where Juanito sat on his horse waiting, his contemptuous eyes on the

mass of horsemen who now were jog-trotting leisurely out there nearly a half-mile away. I unslung the binoculars and took a look. Maldito was in the lead again and apparently not too badly hurt. He didn't ride like it, though no once could ever tell about one of those tough Yaqui fighters.

Juanito said, "The Señorita Torcuata made it all right and should be safe in the house by now. I heard shooting, but couldn't see much."

"I didn't do much except slow them up a bit," I said. "They had to wait until Maldito got on José's horse after I killed the one Maldito was riding."

"José?" Juanito demanded in surprise. "My brother? What's that little devil doing with them?"

I said, "He's wearing a red band around his sombrero now, Juanito. He's thrown in with them for loot and women."

"Santa María! That dirty little cabrón. I don't care which side he fights on if he wants to fight. But Red Flagging—"

"I tried to kill him," I said harshly.

"Then I'll do better when my turn comes," he said, just as harshly.

I knew how he felt. You always know —when you've been born in Mexico and your first playmates and schoolmates are little dark-eyed urchins; when you grow up and marry them as often as you marry among yourselves; when you become aware that life for the lower class is virtual slavery and is a daily battle to keep clothes and find sufficient food. It makes life, human life, as cheap as dirt and teaches a man to have little regard for it, even his own.

Then a revolution comes along and a slave finds himself on a good horse with a good rifle slung over his back, a free man living off the land so long as he fights. So what difference did it make on which side a man fought? He fought on one side until he tired of it, then got on his horse and went over and fought on the other side for a while.

But in all this circumjacence brought on as a result of a country writhing in the throes of a blood bath, it was one thing to fight any place you please. It was quite another to turn looter of the place where you had been born!

VIII

IF JOSE had been killed, Juanito wouldn't have cared. He would have forgotten it by the following day. That was why I hoped I wouldn't be around when the two met again, because I knew what was going to happen. Juanito Camacho would kill his young brother on sight.

And of course I knew what had caused the big vaquero to wait for me there on the ridge above Frenchman's Pox Gulch. Apolinar and his *gambusinos*. Roaring drunk and filled with sudden *revoltoso* boldness now that Huerta was about finished. Jailing Don Sebastian on the pretext that he was one of the rich Spaniard exploiters of the peons, when actually it was to settle a grudge because the old man had, under the exigencies of war, shut down the mine and stamp mill.

They were fifty to one against me, and yet Juanito had waited.

He looked over as though to inquire if I would circle town and slip into the barricaded house. When I sent Chico down the declivity to the bottle-can-trash-littered floor of the gully it meant that I was going through town, and Juanito followed without hesitation. In the street we rode past gaping, deserted doorways and walls covered with faded lettering.

Tequila, suave. *Mezcal*, fino. *Pulque* —fermented juice of those maguey plants out there which had saved our lives. *Cerveza*—beer. And, ironically, *No Annunciar*—no posters.

All deserted and forlorn since the shut-down of the mine. The men were now *soldados* in one army or another, on one side or another; their women the *soldaderas* who foraged for their men, bore their children, and often fought in battle, some of the younger never having known any home but the top of a

swaying, jolting freight train.

The whole gulch was deserted and forlorn except for the green of Serafina Mendoza's big patio rammed up against the base of the ridge. Here she lived with her various "daughters."

Serafina leaned her big, full-blown bosom over the front gate and shrilled curses and obscenities at me as we passed at a trot. She was squat and fat and middle-aged. She couldn't write her name, but with native shrewdness she had learned early in life that to peon girls like her the world offered little. Marry and live a life of barefooted poverty in an adobe hut filled with dirty, hungry children. But not Serafina. She had her beautiful house with many rooms and it was filled with laughter and wine, and there had been much money.

At least there had been until the summer before. First I'd shot Apolinar Romero during the rescue of Maldito, and it had taken months for her to nurse him back to health. When I'd sent word to Jim Carlysle at the Guggenheim stamp in Durango that the almost pure silver was from secret diggings somewhere in Don Sebastian's ancient family mine, the abrupt loss of income had been a terrible blow to the town *puta* whose prosperity these days mostly depended upon Apolinar and his thieves.

No, Serafina had no reason to feel any affection for Don Sebastian's overseer, who was only a hated gringo anyhow.

She spat tobacco juice over the gate as I rode by. "Dirty gringo Spaniard!" she screeched. "*Chingada, cabrón!* Your mother was the daughter of a burro and your father was born in a dung pile of goat droppings. *Cabrón!*"

"Get ready for much business without pay tonight, old Señora Pox!" Juanito bawled lustily. "Back there a short distance two hundred Red Flagger Yaquis are coming in to sack Santa Rosa. Before this night is out you'll have calluses on your fat backside and your ore-stealing friends will walk on cactuses with their feet slit."

"Liar and worker for a Spaniard!" she screamed after us. "The revolution is won and we'll hang you all and take the mine for ourselves!"

HER shrill curses and the deserted gulch with its squalor fell behind. We rode through a green belt of cottonwoods Don Sebastian had ordered planted many years before to shut off the gulch from town. Where we emerged and rounded the promontory we saw the town below. Trees and grass and flowers and vines along the cobble-stoned streets; watered from a big pump flow deep in an abandoned shaft dug by Indian slaves when the Jesuits owned all the mines before they refused to continue giving the King of Spain his share and were ordered out of Mexico.

We clattered along red cobble-stoned streets toward the big plaza and the tall spired church beyond it.

Juanito looked over at me. "Don't forget Apolinar Romero and his boys, Don Guillermo," he finally suggested. "At least fifty of them to two of us. They were out in front of Tony's when I left town. Drunk and shooting tin cans off either other's heads with new rifles. We better go around and find out at the house if anything has happened to Don Sebastian yet."

"You go on, Juanito," I said. "I want a drink in Tony's place first."

Santa Cristo! They've had you marked for death for a long time, but they've been a little afraid to try it up until now. They've bided their time. But now with Mexicans killing gringos you'll be shot the moment you enter the front door!"

I said, "I've had Apolinar marked for death ever since he murdered Jim Carlysle and left Mary a widow. But I also have known how to bide my time."

At this moment I was glad indeed that I had waited; glad I hadn't walked into Tony's place some night and shot Apolinar dead. He was the acknowledged leader of his ore-stealing boys

and, no matter what else, a tough fighter by any standard. He'd proved how tough he was when he'd taken a .45-caliber slug of lead in the shoulder and only grunted and spat.

I wanted to see him now and make certain there would be *no* clash between us. Without his leadership the *gambusinos* wouldn't fire a shot. They'd flee and probably hide in the new diggings where they had found high grade so rich it had made Jim Carlysle suck in his breath when told it was from their own diggings. *Planchas de plata*—slabs of silver—Jim had said.

Somewhere in Don Sebastian's ancient *mina antigua.*

But Apolinar had courage and a certain amount of animal cunning. He'd know what to expect after the stomping of an unknown Yaqui the year before. Word of things like that always got back to the others behind Bacatete and in the army, and Yaquis didn't forget. Somebody was due to have their feet slit for that night's work.

Tony's big place was on the west side of the wide street, facing the plaza and the church beyond, and when we neared it I spurred Chico into a fast lope and hit for the rear. I was counting on surprise, and luck was with us. Juanito and I were dismounted and half-way through the kitchen before anybody noticed us.

We went into the noisy front part of the big, low-ceilinged building.

The rough bar, forty-five feet in length, was along the west rear part in front of the kitchen and anyone had to come through a small side room to get around one end of it. That was why none of the men present saw us until we were in position. I didn't care about anyone except Apolinar. The others wouldn't move until he did.

He was standing in his favorite position near the north end of the bar, close to the front window, looking out onto the porch. He was laughing at two of his men who, having got hold of some machinery grease, were rolling over and over on the front porch trying to smear it into each other's faces and hair. Four others were sound asleep on the floor in a corner of the room, rifles across their laps. The ancient pool table with its ripped and burned green top cloth held the close attention of a dozen of them, and there wasn't one who wasn't palming stacks of silver and gold, while all bet wildly on each shot of the two players.

Some Spaniard had been hauled from his home and forced to pay tribute in the name of Liberty, Freedom, and Equality. *Viva Revolucion!*

JUANITO and I had almost reached the bar before Apolinar turned his head from the oil-smeared contestants and the ring of men around them. The laughter went out of his face in a hurry. He pushed his powerful shoulders away from the bar and stood there looking at me silently. He was packing a pistol and wore a bandolier of rifle cartridges over one shoulder, guerilla style. And he now sported a needle-peaked, roll-brim sombrero.

I pretended not to see him and went on to the bar where the inscrutable Tony Pizza moved forward to serve us. Nothing ever fazed Tony. He was a businessman who took no sides in any quarrel, gave no credit, loaned no money.

He said casually, "Hello, Don Guillermo. I'm glad to see you again. You haven't been in in more than a month now."

"I was a little afraid to leave the hacienda, Tony," I told him and ordered tequila.

Apolinar moved toward us, glass in hand. The game at the pool table had stopped as though by magic and the players were quiet. They were watching Apolinar and glancing at rifles scattered all over the room.

"You used good sense, my friend." Apolinar said softly. "You were a fool to come here today."

I said, "I've been afraid to leave the

hacienda because of the revolution, mister. And you aren't going to do anything now, you and the rest of the thieves. Tony, I'm afraid I've got bad news for you. Do you remember that half-breed Yaqui the *gambusinos* were stomping to death that night last summer when I came in and dragged him out?"

Tony nodded, without speaking. Tony Pizza wasn't much at talking. Apolinar had to put in his two-bits worth because his men were listening. And waiting. He sneered that big rough-mouthed sneer of his.

"I haven't forgotten either, gringo. I've got plenty of reasons for remembering him—and you."

I sneered right back at him. "You'll have a whole lot better reason to remember him and me, too, before it's over. Tony, that Yaqui hit Hacienda de Galindo today with two hundred tough raiders, most of them veterans of Obregon's army. They burned it."

"Hey!" shouted Apolinar and waved a hand to his men. "Hey, hombres, come and listen! The fighters in the revolution have burned the hacienda of old *rico* Spaniard Don Sebastian! Viga Obregon! Viva Villa!"

He jiggled a handful of gold coins in one palm and I knew then where their sudden wealth had come from. From Don Sebastian, whom they all hated.

Tony grunted at him and waited. He didn't ask me any questions. I turned to Apolinar and his men now grouping around him, their rifles forgotten.

I said, "Some day I'm going to kill you, Apolinar, but not today. I didn't come here for that. I came to tell you that the man you stomped here on this floor a year ago is leading them. He's Pluma Colorada, one of their chiefs. You and your ore thieves can fight or you can walk on cactus with the soles of your feet slit. What are you going to do? Let him sack the town, or fight him?"

"You say he's at the ranch?"

"He's now out there not far from the gulch. He'll be here in fifteen minutes."

Apolinar looked at Tony and scowled, then looked at the suddenly uneasy faces of his men. He switched his glance back to me.

"You want Don Sebastian? I got him in jail. We were going to hang him tonight because he shut down the mines and is an enemy of the revolution. You want him back?"

"I came in to take him back or kill you. I still mean to. If one of your men makes a move I'll blow your guts through that bar. You've got five minutes to get Don Sebastian here. Tony, put your watch on that bar. Juanito, get on your horse, take Chico, and go with one of these men after Don Sebastian."

APOLINAR wavered a moment, but he fell for it. He couldn't guess I wouldn't have shot him for all the silver in that mine. Behind him the *gambusinos* would fight and possibly prevent unbridled atrocities by the vengeful Maldito and his men. Without his leadership they'd scatter like rats.

"We could stand them off in Don Sebastian's big house," Apolinar finally suggested.

I sneered at him again, making it as ugly as possible. "You made him a prisoner once today and were going to hang him. And now you want protection in his house—in the house of a Spaniard hated by you brand new *revoltosos*. Get him, Apolinar! Half a minute is gone."

He shrugged his big shoulders and placed his glass on the bar. The gold coins from Don Sebastian's money chest in the big house gave off metallic clinks as he slid them into a pocket of his white cotton pants. He turned to a big fat examiner who could have been a twin brother to Juanito.

"Jesus," he ordered, of course pronouncing the name "Hay-zoos," "go to the jail and bring Don Sebastian here at once. Hurry! Obregon's Yaquis will be here any minute, and they are enemies of Pancho Villa, our friend. Kick

those men awake and get your rifles!"

I turned on the *gambusinos*. The place was crowded now with about fifty or so of them. I said coldly, "I'll kill the first man who touches a rifle until Don Sebastian is brought here!"

IX

DOWNING his drink at a gulp, Juanito shifted the rifle slung over his shoulder and hurried out the way he and I had come in. I heard him ordering the big *gambusino* into Chico's saddle and almost at once hoofbeats drummed off to the south.

More hoofbeats came in from the east. A hard-running horse hauled up with a grunt in front of the cantina porch and light spurs tinkled as Torcuata strode into the room. And such is the caste system in Mexico, so solidly ingrained in the lives of the peons, that every man of them instinictively reached up and removed his hat!

She came straight to me, a different Torcuata from the one I had known two hours ago. The arrogance was gone and the fear was a wild-animal thing in her amethyst eyes. She knew I hated her now, and maybe she saw what lay in my own eyes. I glanced over at Apolinar, whose head also was bared, and the irony of it struck at me bitterly.

He had been a tough foreman in the mine owned by Torcuata's father, and where Jim Carlysle had been a superintendent. After the shutdown Jim had gone to work for Meyer Guggenheim at the Ojuela Mine in Durango, and Apolinar had gradually drifted into ore thievery. And when Jim had found out from me that the new high grade had come from the *Mina de Galindo* it had cost him his life at the hands of the big man who now stood before Don Sebastian's daughter.

"Beelie," she almost whispered, and fear was in her voice, too, "they have Don Sebastian in jail. He paid a ransom and still they are going to hang him. Beelie, do something, please!"

"Get on your horse and get out of here," I said sharply. "I'll bring Don Sebastian to the house shortly. Apolinar has changed his mind."

She turned to him, and suddenly the fear was gone, and her eyes began to blaze with the old fires. "You lied to him! You would have hanged the man who fed you most of your life. You stole from him and killed an innocent man because of it."

Right then I knew we were in trouble. Again.

His big mouth split in a lop-sided grin and there was something deliberate in the way he slowly returned the needle-crowned Chihuahua sombrero to his head. The air in the room gave off a distinctive rustle as about fifty *gambusinos* did likewise, and the magic spell was broken. They were fifty again and I was once more one, and she was just the daughter of a *rico* Spaniard they all hated.

Typically, Apolinar shrugged his big shoulders. "Times have changed, señorita. This is a revolution, a fight for Freedom and Equality and Justice."

"A time for more thievery and looting!" she flamed. "A time for murder of those who once filled your stomachs!"

"Torcuata, get out of here!" I ordered sharply.

I might as well have saved my breath. She was the Torcuata of two hours ago, changing her moods as quickly and easily as a chameleon changes colors; the woman who had shattered to shards the traditions of the caste system and flung the pieces in the faces of those who had gossiped. She was the fiery aristocratic scorning as something beneath her feet all those she hated so much.

Tony's big watch ticked on from atop the bar. He leaned on it, braced his elbows, and his inscrutable eyes told nothing. Time was almost up when Apolinar's eyes did. I caught the flick of them, the half nod of his head, and I spun as two of the *gambusinos* snatched up their rifles. Not Mausers like those carried by Maldito and his Yaquis, but

smoothly working lever action repeaters which could be fired with a flick of a drawn hammer. I had my gun out and was firing before I remembered I was wearing another on my left hip.

I shot four times and missed three of them at twenty feet because I was trying to drag out the second gun. The boom cannonaded in the big room and the gun was empty before I saw two men slide down and I got the other gun on Apolinar. He hadn't moved, but some kind of a mob panic had hold of his boys. Several broke for side doors and the front as well, their rifles forgotten momentarily.

I STOOD there snarling at Apolinar and heard Torcuata scream again and again. From out front came the crash of hoofs on hard-packed earth and I would have sworn that the building shook when Juanito's two hundred and thirty pounds hit the porch and his huge bulk crashed through the opening, a six-shooter in a big chubby fist.

He gave off a roar that might have been a Villa yell and the rest of the *gambusinos* fled out of the building in panic.

"Drunken bums!" came his stentorian bellow. "Give me three Villa *Dorados* and I'll clean this town of scum!"

I had the muzzle of the second Colt jammed deep in Apolinar Romero's belly when more footsteps making irregular sounds crossed the porch, and Don Sebastian himself limped in. A stray Yaqui bullet had caught him in the shin bone and shattered it while he stood on foot watching them charge into the horses and cannon Don Sebastian's trains had brought up from Trinidad. And one of those barefooted ones out there had been a half-Mexican named Maldito. Pluma Colorada!

"Don Sebastian—. Don Sebastian!" Torcuata cried and ran to get hold of him. "They said at the house—they said, Don Sebastian—" She never called him "Father."

He pushed her aside, his fierce old eyes burning as he looked at the two dead men and then at me. He'd seen the *gambusinos* fleeing, and now he saw me with an empty six-shooter in one hand and another, a loaded one, jammed into Apolinar's rock-hard belly. *Things* between them had changed since a few hours ago.

He limped forward, upswept mustachios bristling; sixty years old and every inch of him still a Pofirio Diaz general. His first wife had given him two aristocratic sons before going barren, all cadets at the Academy in Chapultapec, all slated to become generals. *Revoltoso* guns—Villa's—had taken their lives in the battle for Juarez. His second wife had added three more sons, and Torcuata. The sons had died at Gomez Palacia. Villa again.

I knew what he was going to say before he said it. So did Apolinar Romero.

"I'll take that pistol, Don Guillermo." He extended a band.

"One moment, *patron*," I told him. "Two hundred Yaqui Red Flaggers—"

"I know about them," he interrupted stridently. "Juanito told me. It makes no difference. I'll pistol this thieving dog, then we'll take care of the Yaquis. Juanito, your pistol. One side, Don Guillermo!"

I reached down and lifted Apolinar's pistol, then stepped in front of him and faced the fiery old man. And it was plain to see where all the fire in Torcuata's soul had come from. It was from generations of Galindo breeding since the days of Cortez, and as though some of the fighting spirit of those fighting black bulls had, through long association, been transferred into the Galindo blood.

Juanito wavered, looked at me, and shrugged, stalling for time.

I said, "We need this man, Don Sebastian. You saw how the *gambusinos* fled. What will happen when the Yaquis come and Apolinar is not here to lead his own fighting men?"

"I've grown soft from a wine glass," the old don answered harshly, and in

self-condemnation. "I've relaxed and grown old while you ran the hacienda and others have done the fighting. Now I'm a general in the Federal Armies again and I know how to handle these dogs. Juanito, your pistol, damn you!"

I thought, Santa Maria! A general again in a town from which all troops had fled. A general in a government that will fall in days!

"Keep your pistol, Juanito," I ordered. "Torcuata, get Don Sebastian out of here on your horse and ride behind him."

"So?" the old man said softly in the dead silence of the room. "I pulled you out of the gutters of Oro Grande when your belly was ripped open by a third-rate bull. Through me you regained respectability and dignity. And this is my thanks. As of this moment you are no longer a member of my household."

He turned on his heel and the bell bottom trousers rustled over his black shoes as he limped toward the front door. Somehow he reminded me of one of his fighting black bulls in the ring—crippled and doomed to death, but erect and magnificent and fearless to the last moment.

BEHIND me Apolinar Romero stirred and a sigh clearly audible went out of the ex-miners, most of them peering in through windows and the doorway. They began to file in and Apolinar turned to Tony.

"*Un tequila,*" he said calmly. "And I'll pay for one for Don Guillermo. I'll drink with him—just this once."

"You'll fight the Yaquis?" I asked.

He shrugged. "What else, after that night in here last summer? Any other *revoltosos*, no, because we're now fighters in the revolution like the other miners who left here. But these Yaquis who slit men's feet, yes, we'll fight."

I said, "I'll give you all the help I can from the house. So will Juanito. If possible we'll join you in the street fighting. But I want you to ride behind me when I leave. I want no bullet in my back." I

WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE DONE?

Actual problems of the Old West and how they were solved

THE mine owners of Panamint, near Death Valley, had a tough problem. The road agents who infested the tortuous bends of Surprise Canyon, the only approach to the hell-roaring little city, were gobbling up almost every outgoing bullion shipment. Even the tough veterans of the Wells Fargo company refused to carry the silver, pointing out that the rough desolate country was a road agent's paradise, and that it would take a small army of guards to protect the shipments. How did the mine owners get their silver safely out of Panamint?

SOLUTION: They cast the metal into balls weighing over 700 pounds and shipped them out in buckboards driven by unarmed teamsters. The road agents could stop the wagons, but had no way to carry the heavy balls over the rough terrain.

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THE U. S. Cavalry posed a problem for Ulzana's raiding Apaches by posting guards at practically every water hole in the Southwest. Yet Ulzana and his ten warriors managed to elude 2,000 soldiers for four weeks, in which time they killed 38 people and covered 1,200 miles. How did the Apaches solve their water supply problem?

SOLUTION: After killing a worn out horse the Indians removed about 35 feet of small intestine, cleaned it and filled it with water. Wound around the body of a pack horse, the tubing provided several days' supply of water, allowing the warriors to bypass the well guarded water holes.

—Robert Stephens

picked up the drink and instinctively said, "*Salud y pesetas y amor*"—much health, wealth, and love—and for some reason everybody broke into loud laughter.

I glanced through the doorway. Torcuata was up on her Morgan, and Don Sebastian was swinging into Juanito's saddle. He ride back of a cantle—he, Don Sebastian Galindo? I should have known.

With Apolinar following me and Juanito bringing up the rear, I went out to Chico. I swung up and the big Apolinar clambered, monkeylike, up behind me. We left at a walk with Juanito striding along beside the horse. It gave me an eerie feeling along the spine to think of those fifty rifles back there in the cantina. Trained and toughened fighters would have run out and shot both Juanito and me dead, riddled us, before I could have killed Apolinar. He also could have clamped those huge hands around my neck and flung us both from the saddle. But maybe he was thinking of Juanito.

The ore thieves had one hell of a lot of respect for big Juanito Camacho.

We went directly through the plaza and past the big yellow church, following Don Sebastian and Torcuata. The town was deserted. Not a soul was in sight. After the flight of Major Garcia and his troops, followed by the drunken revelry of Apolinar and his boys, every house in town was locked and barred. From back of iron-grilled and curtained windows faces peered out, for this was the street of the *ricos*, the rich ones.

Don Sebastian's house occupied the second block from the plaza. Ten rooms facing the street, ten in back, seven on each side. Thirty-four rooms on the ground floor, and the place was two-story. The hollow square inside contained four glassed-in patios and a sunken garden with streams of water flowing from the sculptured statues in the fountain, and flowers all over the place.

We rode around to the side door next to the stables and Apolinar slid to the ground. I swung down, after him. The sky was clear, the air dead, nothing moved except a couple of *zopilotes*, the black buzzards of Mexico, pecking away at something or other farther down the street; probably a dog that had been run over by a carriage.

A frightened servant hurriedly led Chico and the other two horses to the stables. The door before which we stood was twelve feet high and fifteen feet wide. Backed inside was the big six-horse family coach, for it was beneath the old don's dignity to walk to the stables. He finally rode out of the house.

Apolinar stirred uneasily. I said, "This revolution will be over in days, and the fighting will soon stop. Don Sebastian undoubtedly will reopen the mine and start rebuilding the hacienda. If you wish to forget the past and come back to work I believe he can be convinced—"

He didn't let me finish. He gave off a laugh that was half grunt. "You forget, señor"—with extreme politeness—"that *this* time the land will be divided, as was promised by others who won. So will the mines. And now you would bargain with me after we found the ore so thick that Jim Carlysle called it *planchas de plate*. It's true. They are small slabs of pure silver." He grinned at me and I could sense the inner, sneering laughter. "I know. Mary. Carlysle is inside and you'd like to shoot me down like the *ricos* always execute the poor. But you won't. You and old graybeard in there need me to save your precious hides from the menacing and bloodthirsty Yaquis."

He strode off and I turned toward where two servants waited by the opened doors, and four heavily armed vaqueros with rifles stood in stolidness, smoking calmly. I walked in past the carriage and on into the patio directly in back of it.

In the center of the patio, waiting for me, was a woman.

X

MARY CARLYSLE, this woman who had been born within three fields of my father's home, was twenty-five years old. She'd been beautiful when we had been kids together, but a year of marriage to Jim and then a year of widowhood had put a new kind of beauty into her face. The sun shining down into the patios from above seemed to throw a halo on her golden hair as she came to meet me.

I don't know how it happened; perhaps I was thinking that indirectly I was the cause of Jim's death. But she came to me and into my arms. I felt her warm, soft body snugged close against mine, and I kissed her again and again.

"William!" she whispered. "Oh, Bill, how good to see you again!"

She buried her head on my shoulder and over it I saw Torcuata. Her amethyst eyes were blazing with pain, with anger, with jealousy—it was hard to tell which at that moment. Scant hours before I had ripped away her blouse and discovered through the yellow tips of her breasts a family secret, carefully kept—that she was not the pure Castilian she claimed to be. I'd kissed her in anger, and fire had roared through us both for a brief moment. Then it had become Beelie again after the terrible price an old man had paid with his hands, for her insults to the Yaqui raider chief, and she knew I hated her.

Mary pushed back a little breathlessly and gave a half laugh. "Forgive me, Bill, but I couldn't help it."

"Neither could I, Mary," I said and watched Torcuata striding away, disappearing back of the flowing fountain.

Somewhere I heard a roaring voice vibrating through the whole place. Don Sebastian's.

"Damn the hacienda! I'll rebuild it after the jackals have been driven out. But my bull records! My bull breeding records have been burned!"

I sent word by a servant to have my rifle brought in, and Mary and I walked together across the flag-stones, and the nearness of her which had never stirred my blood in the past began to affect me in a way not unlike that which I had experienced when I'd kissed Torcuata so brutally.

Jim Carlysle had been coldly and methodically ambitious, a brusque mining engineer who had been a martinet with his men. But he had loved Mary, and that year of married love had changed her much. I hadn't seen her many times during the past nine years, but she was no longer the Mary I had known in our early years.

Torcuata, on the other hand, had experienced no such love. Her future had been a family-arranged affair; it had brought humiliation and disgrace from the lustful, drunken young Don Carlos Martinez two nights before the one that had been set for their wedding.

I said, "Mary, what could you possibly be doing here in Santa Rosa at a time when the last of the folks have all been driven out of Colonia Oaxaca into Arizona? Why didn't you go to them at Douglas? You know you're not safe here."

We were ascending the broad stairs of stone to the inner balcony of the great house where the quarters that had been assigned to me faced the street. From the upper windows I could sweep the town with binoculars.

"I think I'm safe now that you're here," she said softly. "You're becoming quite a legend among our folks."

"God forbid," I said bitterly, thinking of my father.

He'd raised me in strict accordance with our Mormon creed as laid down by our murdered martyrs—no smoking, drinking, blasphemy, and no violence. Nothing but a plain life of honest work with daily morning and evening devotion. I had turned my back on it all for the bloody sands of a bull ring, and he had repudiated me. And in the years since I'd last viewed his stern visage I had killed seven men—and a few more this very day.

I ASKED her again, "What are you doing here instead of being at home, Mary?"

"Believe it or not, Bill, I'm actually here to do a job that would have been done by Jim. When you sent word to him that the high grade which Apolinar Romero and his men were selling actually was coming from a new strike in Don Sebastian's mine you can imagine his reaction. You knew his Mormon code of honor. He'd been a stern superintendent here in Santa Rosa and had merely tolerated Apolinar as a run-of-the-mill Mexican foreman. Apolinar hadn't forgotten either. He shot Jim, and the Guggenheims didn't find out the truth about the ore until lately. They sent me here with an apology to Don Sebastian, an offer to make good, and to seek inside information on the new ore body. They wish to buy, of course."

"He won't sell," I told her. "That old mine was discovered and worked by the Jesuits with Indian converts until the padres began refusing to send the King of Spain his cut, and were ordered out, to be replaced by Franciscans who were not miners. After the Galindos helped to kick Spain out of Mexico in the big revolt this old mine was their reward. Miles of tunnels and shafts, including that 'T' tunnel project Jim drove into the base of Duckbill Three and found nothing."

"And you never found the strike?"

"I tried to buy it and three men lost their lives trying to sell. I could have beaten the information out of one of them but Don Sebastian last year ordered me to forget it until after the government is finally stabilized. That wine glass hasn't been good for him since he lost all five of his sons in four years under Pancho Villa's guns. All he has left now is Torcuata, and something in what happened today struck new fire. No, he'll never sell, Mary."

I opened the tall, white door to my rooms and Mary and I went in. It was a distinct relief to unload the binoculars and two shoulder bandoliers of cartridges, though one of the latter now held quite a number of empty loops. I took the binoculars from their leather case, went to a window, and began to sweep the town. Not a sign of life in front of Tony's place now. It was a good guess that Apolinar already had scattered his boys around in strategic positions. I swung the glasses over house tops to the northwest where green from the belt of cottonwoods blotted out the squalor of the gulch.

No sign of the Yaquis.

I thought, What the hell! They should have been here by now. And I didn't like the looks of things. Maldito knew where I would be, with Torcuata. If he stormed the house first and got the Galindos and the rest of us, then tonight Santa Rosa would witness a blood bath that never would be forgotten.

"Well, Don Guillermo?" came Mary's half-bantering voice.

I said, "I don't know, Mary. And I don't like it."

She pulled me around by a shoulder and reached up with a firm grip and took the glasses. We sat down on a big lounge and I instinctively put my arms around her and kissed her again. It was a kiss of affection because of the affinity of our heritage and environment, and yet the hunger of loneliness was an equal flame in both of us.

"Have any of the folks dared to come back across the line to Colonia Oaxaco?" I asked her.

Colonia Oaxaco, as well as Colonia Morelos and Colonia Dublan, were the result of the Edmund-Tucker law of 1882, which had prohibited our fathers and grandfathers from having more than one wife. As a matter of fact only a small minority ever had practiced polygamy after the founding of Salt Lake, and our people soon would have stamped that out, had they been let alone.

But Senator Edmund wouldn't have it that way and in 1882, when the law was passed, Federal officers had begun their hounding of the small minority. Four

years of arrests and persecutions had followed until the day a group of families had loaded up their goods and hit straight for Mexico.

WEEK after week across burning deserts and mountains, across creek and river, over rock and sands. My father and Mary's father, themselves monogamists, had gone with them to establish new homes in a strange land, to help establish Colonia Diaz and Colonia Juarez in Chihuahua. I had been born one week after our big wagons made the final halt, Mary three years later.

It had lasted ten years there at Colonia Diaz—until 1896—when dissension had arisen and some of us moved on westward into Sonora and established Dublan, Morelos, and Oaxaca, on the Bapiste River, on a hundred thousand acres of virgin land. And again, as it had been so many times in the past all over Arizona, it was a case of our strength backed by determination and faith during the next fourteen years that had molded from virgin soil a land of orchards and fields and homes and schools. We'd built roads and given them free to the state until old Dictator Diaz had exclaimed fervently, "What could I not do with my beloved Mexico if I had more settlers like these!"

But the old iron-handed man had been in exile in Paris by then and the hungry, hate-filled locusts had swarmed down upon us, led by such men as Red Lopez, Salazar the Cruel, and Pancho Villa, demanding our horses and wagons and grain and, in particular, our guns—with Federal troops themselves the worst looters of all, in the name of the government. Fifteen hundred of them at one time occupied our homes and fields.

I sat there in Don Sebastian's house that afternoon with Mary Carlysle in my arms and thought of the past and the tangled skeins that had enmeshed the lives of first our parents and now us. My father had led the last twenty-one wagons with ninety-four people the seventy miles to the Border at battle-scarred Agua Prieta, Sonora, and crossed into the sanctuary of Douglas, Arizona. Behind them lay burned and looted barns and homes, smashed furniture—what had not been used for firewood—and broken sewing machines and music boxes scattered in the once clean streets.

The revolution had played no favorites. Our people had paid heavily, too.

Mary said, "I went home to Arizona for a while after Jim was killed. I saw your father and mother and your six brothers. I think the younger ones are secretly proud of you."

"I hope my father does not suspect them of that," I said, again with bitterness. "I'm an American citizen born in Mexico and who's never set foot on American soil. I've broken the creed of my father, even though it was in self-defense. I couldn't face him now after killing seven men, not to mention a few Yaqui Indians and one Mexican vaquero this afternoon."

"Meaning that you'll never see him and your mother again? That you can't ever go back?"

"Can a man ever go back, Mary? Am I fitted to go back and dig more irrigation ditches and plant more orchards?"

"If you wanted to badly enough. You wanted to fight bulls badly enough to get yourself almost disemboweled in the ring."

That had been nine years before, and God knew I didn't want to fight any bulls now. Even after five years on the hacienda I still couldn't get close to those needle-pointed Piedras Negras horns inside the bull boxes without feeling a certain constriction in the ridged cicatrix stretching all the way across my stomach.

Sound like the rumble of approaching thunder rolled in through the window and I picked up the binoculars again. The Yaquis! Then coming in a short, rein-tight gallop—and I understood now the slight delay.

Mounted in saddles in front of eight of the grinning Yaqui raiders were Serafina Mendoza and her seven giggling girls.

Horses and riders came on in a black wave and spread out toward the plaza and the stores and Tony Pizza's cantina. Morgan steel-shod hoofs on cobble stones.

A WOMAN servant entered hurriedly with my rifle and withdrew. Mary's hand rested on my left shoulder while we watched the plaza and the milling mob of men and horses. Not far from Tony's place was the big store of Simón Levy, whose immigrant father had come from Europe a long time ago, long before my own people had come to Mexico in 1886. A big hawk-faced man, beloved of the poor for his trust and generosity, he was standing adamantly in the open doorway of his store as about twenty of the wild *Sin Ropas* jumped down and ran for the porch.

I think it was the dark face his Mexican mother's blood had given him that caused Simón's tragic death that afternoon. To these wild Yaquis from Bacatete he was another *rico* Spaniard to be killed and his place looted. They leaped at him, naked black bodies gleaming.

The powerful binoculars brought it all up close. The hatchet in the hands of one and a long, razor-bladed knife in the hands of another—slashing. Simón's almost decapitated body rolled to one side and the Red Flaggers poured in, followed by a horde of others.

Santa Rosa's blood bath had begun.

XI

LEAVING its resting place on my shoulder, Mary Carlysle's hand slid over around my neck and her arm tightened, her indrawn breath whistling sharply into my ear. The distance hadn't been so far that she needed binoculars.

"Bill," she breathed out in a shaken voice. "They—they—"

I said, "It's not only here, Mary. It's going on all over Mexico. It's happening this very moment in a hundred other towns except that we don't see the others. It's war, Mary! It will be this way until Huerta is driven out and a new government established."

I still had the glasses glued to the scene. Quite a body of the Yaquis had ridden on to Tony's with the girls, and two of the howling *mansos* were struggling to unload Serafina from where she sat tightly wedged in the high-horned Mexican saddle while the others roared with more laughter. I thought, Tony, my friend, this is one time you're going to give credit to some customers.

Sin Ropas began to file out of Simón Levy's front door, stepping over his almost decapitated body, their arms filled with clothing—mostly cotton shirts and pants and straw hats. They stripped off to black nakedness in the street and stood around chattering while fumbling to unbotton new shirts. Five minutes more and they no longer were the breech-clouted wild ones.

They were *mansos* now. Clothing had made them tame.

Maldito came out of Tony's place followed by about twenty of his raiders, and I could tell from the way they handled themselves that all were veterans from the army of Alvaro Obregon. You could see it in the way they waited for him to limp over and mount first. José Camacho and Arturo Felix rode beside him as they loped across the grassy plaza, pulled up in front of the church, and went in.

Maldito and José Camacho came out first, dragging the priest by his wrists. A low cry broke from Mary when they flung him down the stone steps. When three nuns followed, Mary gave a choking sound, turned away and buried her face in her hands.

It didn't take much longer to do to them what the *Sin Ropas* had done to Simón Levy, and when the butchery was done with the group trotted inside once more. When they emerged a second time José Camacho carried a golden

candelabra with a marble base. Holding it between his knees he first tied a chalice veil around his neck, then began smashing the marble on the stone steps to free it of the gold. He was laughing like a madman and I thought, I'm glad your brother is not here with that Mauser.

And I was. One shot from Don Sebastian's big barricaded house and they'd storm it before Apolinar and his boys could get into action with their rifles.

Mary's hand was back on my shoulder again, though her eyes carefully avoided those huddled figures on the red-stained steps of the church. The door to my apartments opened and Don Sebastian limped in, followed by Torcuata. I felt Mary's hand leave my left shoulder.

In silence I handed Don Sebastian the binoculars and he focused them on the scene out there while to our ears came plainly the whoops from Tony's cantina, now jammed to overflowing.

Nobody seemed to be in a hurry. The Red Flaggers had the town and they knew it.

"So?" Don Sebastian said softly, his anger at me in the cantina apparently a thing of the past. "The jackals have arrived and already begun their work. They killed ten of my best fighting bulls and I swear by the Virgin Mary that every one of them shall pay with his life!"

"If you'll look over on the steps of the church you'll find that bulls are not very important right now," I pointed out.

He focused a moment on the four grotesque figures in black, huddled together, and lowered the binoculars. His aristocratic face was pale and the gray mustachios with the famous Pofirio Diaz upsweep were quivering.

BUT when he spoke his voice was strangely calm. He was a general again, and such scenes were not new to his fierce old eyes. "What has happened to Apolinar and his cursed ore thieves?"

"That, *Patron*," I said, "is something I also would like to know."

We were not long in getting an answer to that one! Serafina Mendoza came out the front door of Tony's place —she and Maldito, he with a golden chalice cup tied to his belt. She held a bottle of mezcal in one hand and had an arm around the neck of Pluma Colorada. The two of them stepped off the porch and began walking toward a long row of solidly built adobe houses that were a veritable fortress. Halfway there they stopped, and she seemed to call out to someone.

I had the glasses again and so close were the figures brought to me that I could see the grin on Apolinar's face as he came out to meet them and the three came together. Serafina's arms went around the neck of each of them and they shook hands and laughed while they patted each other on the back in the usual Mexican greeting between friends.

The town whore of Santa Rosa had blasted our hopes of escape and sealed our doom!

In the strange, bitter silence now permeating the room the tall white door behind us opened again. Maria Pizza came in. She carried a tray with glasses and a decanter of Oporto wine. She had been mature enough at thirteen for men in her father's cantina to take a second look under Tony's stern but practical eye. At fifteen she had been brought from the big house in town to the hacienda to help serve drinks to wedding guests, and had been ordered by young Don Carlos Martinez to wait for him in the darkness of a room, where he had found Torcuata instead.

At seventeen she had screamed out the warning that had kept Apolinar Romero's knife out of my back and, instead, got him a .45-caliber slug in the shoulder. Now at eighteen her bosom was full and well-rounded, her lips a little wide but inviting, and her quarter-Italian blood gave a certain sparkle to her dark eyes.

"Don Guillermo," she murmured. "You have been away from us too long."

"If only Don Carlos Martinez could see you now!" I laughed and watched her blush, lowering her lids demurely, then suddenly lifting her eyes frankly to meet mine.

I was certainly glad she wasn't in the cantina of her father right now! Those Yaquis would have taken her like hungry wolves.

From the window Don Sebastian, rumbled angry curses and imprecations. He said sharply, "You will pour no more wine for me in this house, Maria, child. I have been thinking too much of five sons whose deaths have ended this branch of the Galindo name. They died while I remained at home with a wine glass. Tell Juanito to have the coach ready at once. I'm leaving to join General Valesquez's army in the south."

"Yes, *patron*. But Juanito says to tell you this place is already surrounded by Yaqui guards. He has seen them dismounted in many streets."

Maldito. He'd done it at that hacienda before appearing there. Now he'd done it again.

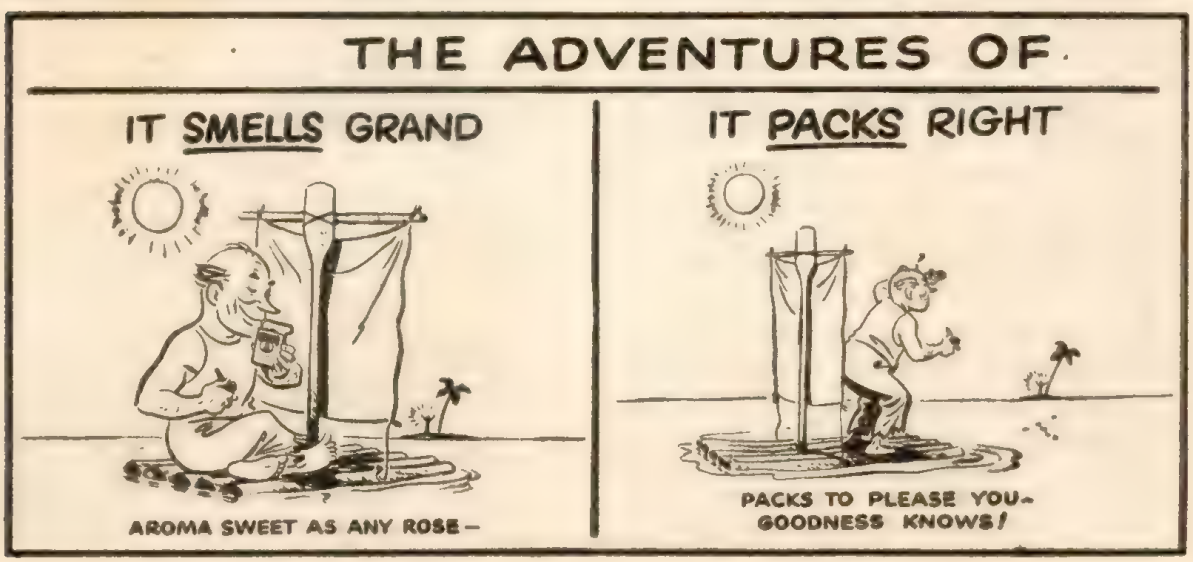
There wasn't much to be done at the moment except to wait. My plans for getting away immediately in the coach were now torn to shards by the town whore, a half-breed Yaqui with slaughter and destruction in his heart, and a Mexican ore thief killer. I drank some of the Oporto Maria Pizza poured for me, then went into another room. My shirt was soaked with sweat around the armpits. I laid my bolero jacket on the bed and was removing the wet shirt when a rustle came from the doorway. Torcuata. She had never before seen me without a shirt.

She said, with a wry attempt at humor, "You saw me today without a blouse, Guillermo, and discovered the secret our family has for so long kept well—that my mother's father was a French officer in the army of Emperor Maximilian. So perhaps it is not inconsistent now that I also see you the same way." She hesitated, and when I didn't answer she smiled bitterly. "I know. You hate me very much for what happened today, don't you?" Her eyes searched mine.

"I don't know," I told her harshly. "All I can think of is a pair of bleeding hands nailed to saguaro."

"I know," she whispered, and I saw a shudder go through her shoulders. "But could I know that such a terrible thing would happen?" she pleaded. "I—I was only angry at you. You'd been so cold—."

"Was it my fault what happened two nights before your wedding when Don Carlos became filled with drunken lust for Maria Pizza? Was it my fault you became hard and cold and turned your hatred on all men, me especially, be-



cause you saw me several times a week?"

SHE wasn't hard and cold now. At this moment Torcuata was a woman with the agony of remorse burning her soul while she pleaded to be understood. "No, not your fault. All mine. But it has taken the way you kissed me, the burning of our ancestral home, the terrible thing that happened to poor Juan Pablo—"

"The burning of the hacienda was because you hid that paltry pile of gold instead of letting them have it. Don Sebastian's bull breeding records are in ashes because of it. Juan Pablo is dead. Now go tell your father all of what happened, and why."

I turned my back on her and began to run water from a brass spigot into the porcelain basin, and from back of me came the swish of her gaucho trousers. She was gone, sick with remorse. But she was still the Torcuata who could change moods as the chameleon changed its colors.

I lathered my hands and began to scrub around the armpits.

I had the new white shirt on and was tying the black string tie when Tio Balindo came in with a full wine glass and gave me a leering grin, as though he were nursing something special in the way of a secret. He was sixty-four, two years older than Don Sebastian, and without a doubt the worst old lecher in Mexico. His dark neck was long and stringy and wrinkled, and his Adam's apple looked as big as a baseball. Despite his age and attempted dignity the outlandish Diaz upswept mustachios made him look almost as ridiculous as young Don Carlos had looked those years before when I had hauled him out of his saddle and back-handed his arrogant young face.

In the big landed families of Mexico the various holdings are divided up among the younger generation of men as they become of age, each male member receiving according to his ability. For Tio Galindo his portion, allotted by an elderly grandfather patriarch, had been a good-sized hacienda in the southern part of the state of Chihuahua, on the edge of the fabulous Terrazas family's holdings.

But Tio Galindo had liked his wine and cards and women too well, while his barren wife hadn't done so badly along the same line among the *ricos* in Mexico City. Ten years before, when the last of their portion had disappeared, they had descended upon the house in Santa Rosa to live out the remainder of their lives in ease and comfort.

Two gentle, cultured people who lived quietly, went faithfully to mass on Sun-

[*Turn page*]

UNCLE WALTER

IT SMOKES SWEET

WITH EVERY PUFF YOUR PLEASURE GROWS!
-with Sir Walter Raleigh!

IT CAN'T BITE!

SIR WALTER RALEIGH'S BLEND OF CHOICE KENTUCKY BURLEYS IS EXTRA-AGED TO GUARD AGAINST TONGUE BITE, AND SIR WALTER RALEIGH NEVER LEAVES A SOGGY HEEL IN YOUR PIPE. STAYS LIT TO THE LAST PUFF.

It costs no more to get the Best!

days, and probably offered up a few daily prayers for God and to send a bolt of lightning through Don Sebastian's bedroom window some night and relieve him of his limp as well as part of his holdings in mines, land, and cattle.

"These are bad times, Don Guillermo —bad times indeed," Tio Galindo remarked unctiously. "Evil days for those of us of the aristocracy."

"They can get worse," I said, wondering what the drooling, hyprocritical old son of a bitch wanted.

"Ah, yes. And that is what I fear. I'm filled with uneasiness."

"You're not the only one."

He came closer and gave me that leering look again, the odor of sour wine fighting with garlic for control of his breath. "I'm referring to my brother, Don Guillermo. This foolish idea that he is a general again. Why, he hasn't served since poor unfortunate Pofirio Diaz fought the last great battle with the Yaquis before the peaks of Bacatete. What can he do with so pitifully few against so many out there in the streets? Why, would you believe it, when they seized him in town this morning he scorned them even as they led him away to jail to await hanging!"

I THOUGHT, Yes, and aren't you disappointed, too! It must have broken your foul heart when I got him out of it.

"You can't treat with these people," I said shortly, and gave the tie a final tug. "They've been on the bottom too long. They're on top now, even though it might be just until old Carranza goes in as new President—"

"Exactly! Exactly, my dear Don Guillermo. A wise statement. So something must be done. My good wife already has food and wine in the coach and you must convince my stubborn young brother that those of us who wish to flee be allowed to do . . . . On second thought, I have still a *better* plan!"

He had one all right. It was a beauty.

He was right about an inevitable assault against the house, followed by the slaughter of the Galindos and all others except the women servants. That was a foregone conclusion and we both knew it. It would be impossible for a mass escape of men, women, and half a dozen children belonging to women servants. But, said Tio Galindo, young Don Sebastian was a stubborn man. He lacked the wisdom of his older brother. However, if he preferred to remain and die, then let him do so. But if a good driver like Don Guillermo Sandrigan, the overseer, would take some of the vaqueros as guards for the coach, at least *some* of the Galindo family would escape, to return after the fighting was over to peace and prosperity.

He even had the gall to offer me part of his inheritance!

XII

CONTEMPT for the profligate Tio Galindo had been and still was in me. I'd come to hate him because he had been instrumental in making the match that had almost ruined Torcuata's life. He had jogged the forty miles between the Galindo and Martinez haciendas in a coach to drink wine and preen his mustachios and wink suggestively at young Don Carlos when a servant girl came too close and was pinched on her buttocks.

That unforgettable night at the hacienda. Young Don Carlos staggering out on the balcony above the arches, his befuddled mind clearing while Torcuata, her blouse in rags, screamed at him, in plain sight of two hundred upturned faces in the patios:

"You dog! You filthy, drunken dog! I never wanted to marry you in the first place. I'd share the bed of a *Sin Ropa* bronco Yaqui before I'd take you for a husband!"

The only satisfaction I'd ever got out of the affair was when Tio Galindo had jumped up to take charge of affairs, had lost his footing and fallen backward into a cactus bed, where he had lain, howling drunken curses at the Martinez family

for the disgrace it had brought upon the Galindos.

That was the man who stood in my room this afternoon and offered me family gold to spirit him and his wife away and leave the others to die.

"I won't tell Don Sebastian of this," I told him.

"Oh, of course not, of course not. The utmost secrecy, Don Guillermo. I—"

"Get out!" I snarled at him.

The air in the room felt cleaner after he was gone. I went back into the living room of my quarters.

There was nothing to do but wait it out through the afternoon. Juanito Camacho was on guard with the other vaqueros downstairs, and with strict orders not to fire a shot unless in case of an attack. I didn't know what else to do. Any attempt to get away in the coach would bring swift and deadly pursuit that could have but one certain ending for all the occupants. So I waited out the long hours in the hope they'd all get too drunk, that they'd become diverted, that darkness—

I sat there before the big window and watched the howling, whooping mob in the cleared area between Tony's and the plaza. They were holding a mock election and had elected Serafina Mendoza the new *Jefe de politico*, the regular mayor having discreetly and wisely fled with Captain Garcia's command.

Under the tight dictatorial system of old Porfirio Diaz, which was being continued ruthlessly by Huerta after he had shot Madero and Vice-President Pino Suarez, the local mayors of all cities and towns carried absolute power themselves as long as it conformed with government policy.

It was all right to allow the students and doctors and lawyers and others like them to sit in the plazas evenings and discuss politics. But the chief of police and his men knew that their jobs, their very lives, in fact, depended upon keeping eyes on every person and ears open for those who spoke out too boldly. When some did, the judge before whom they were tried talked first with the mayor and passed sentence accordingly. In many cases this meant death the following day at the hands of a military squad from the nearest Federal garrison or from the *Rurales*, who held the same power of summary trials and sentences.

"Catch in the act. Kill on the spot."

That infamous order had been a part of the lives of these Mexicans, they knew it well, and many had suffered because of it. Serafina, the town whore, knew it all, too.

Serafina wasn't long in going into action.

Mary Carlysle was again beside me that afternoon when a group of whooping Yaquis and their new *gambusino* friends brought four men from the jail where Don Sebastian also had been confined. They were brought on four saddleless burros sequestered from a frightened woodcutter, the loads unceremoniously dumped on the ground before the front door of the *carcel*.

HOWLING with drunken laughter and beating the little animals on the rumps with sticks, the procession came to a halt before the front porch of Tony's just as more of them came struggling out through the big door with the ancient pool table. Somebody brought a chair and placed it on top of the table and, amid roars of laughter, the new mayoress was boosted up to hold her first trial. It seemed as though they hadn't bothered to elect a judge.

I couldn't hear the words, of course, although the powerful binoculars brought the scene up close. Serafina sat up there like a big frog, the rolls of fat hanging loosely from her arms and elbows. Below her great knees four wretched men stood in silence, and yet with a certain kind of dignity. Ramon Perez, whose vast holdings included much timber land in the Sierra Madres; Felipe Montaño, haciendado and himself owner of mines; Luis Chavez, who owned stock in Don Sebastian's *Banco*

Minero, or mining bank; and one other who already had suffered more than he deserved to—Don Raul Martinez, father of young Don Carlos Martinez, who spoke of his son and had studiously avoided Don Sebastian since that fateful night at Hacienda de Galindo.

Of them all, I pitied him most. The disgrace of his son had been an equal disgrace to the father and to an old Spanish family name. Pascual Orozco, the Red Flagger, had looted and then shot up with cannon the Martinez hacienda forty miles from Santa Rosa. And I had often wondered how many times this tired old man had peered from a window and watched Torcuata running a big black Morgan horse along the streets with her hat standing out behind her shoulders and the breeze whipping at her arrogant, defiant face.

Two more things happened almost simultaneously. Maria Pizza came into the room again at the moment when her father appeared on the front porch of his cantina in an effort to put a stop to the deadly farce that was coming. I saw him waving his arms angrily and for him that was a mistake. Apolinar Romero, wanting to show his good friend Maldito that the *gambusinos* were all for the revolution, yelled an order and in a flash some of his men had Tony. There was a brief struggle, a wrestling knot of men funneled down through the crowd, and Tony was flung up before the edge of the pool table "bar of justice."

A cry broke from Maria. She whirled and broke for the door. I dropped the glasses and went after her. She was running for the stairs, crying, "Papa, papa!" and when I got hold of her it took all my strength to subdue her big eighteen-year-old body.

"Let me go — let me go!" she screamed. "That old whore! That daughter of an old whore, I'll kill her!"

Juanito came plunging up the stairs from his position beside a window in the south patio and I nodded for him to take her. He got her in an iron grip and she ceased to struggle and began to whimper.

"It's all right, Maria," I tried to soothe her, though knowing it wasn't all right. "He's their friend. They're just having some fun with him. You know Serafina wouldn't let anything happen to him. Now go back to your duties like a good girl."

I went back inside. Mary was using the glasses. She lowered them and shook her head. "It looks bad, Bill. You know what liquor does to an Indian, and particularly to those who have been treated as the Yaquis have."

I knew—and those dark-clad bodies out there on the steps of the church already were stiffening.

The pushing and yelling and shouting went on for another thirty minutes, then the five prisoners were hustled inside the cantina. Presently a man dashed out and flung himself into the saddle. Arturo Felix. He spurred straight across the plaza at a run, standing high in the stirrups and waving what appeared to be a pair of women's white drawers, probably taken from one of Serafina's girls. He loped down toward where we waited and the iron-shod hoofs of the Morgan rang out hard on the cobble stones.

"Don't shoot—don't shoot!" he was yelling at the top of his lungs.

"Wait here," I said to Mary Carlysle and ran downstairs into the main patio near the luxurious living room next to the tall French doors, now protected by a grillwork of black iron.

JUANITO trotted up and we pushed inside to where Don Sebastian and Torcuata, Tio and Tia Galindo and Maria waited. Tia Galindo puffed nervously on a cigarette and rubbed a finger across her fuzzy black mustache. She was a bony woman of about sixty, dressed in black silk paid for by Don Sebastian; a woman who barely could read and write.

"They want some kind of an answer," Don Sebastian said to me. "Give me

your pistol and I'll make the proper kind in a language they understand."

"Let me talk with him, *patron*." I said.

"I'm still the master of this house, Don Guillermo," he reminded me coldly.

"Yes, *patron*, and a Mauser rifle can shoot accurately from there to here. This may be a trap, and what matter if we kill a young fool who came unwittingly?"

Juanito and I unbarred the heavy inner door and the huge iron hinges creaked a bit as we swung them back. Ordinarily they were covered by drapes hung over them. I opened one of the doors and looked out through the locked grillwork at Arturo. But Juanito let out a roar before I could speak.

"Where's José?" he bellowed.

"Over there with his friends," Young Arturo grinned nervously. Maldito had chosen him as messenger because he'd not hesitated in helping with the gruesome work on the steps of the church.

"Tell him I'll kill him before this night is out!" Juanito roared angrily.

I put a hand on his arm. "Why do you come?" I asked Arturo.

"Maldito and Apolinar Romero. They have a message which I bring. Your Spaniard friends have been found guilty, and sentenced to death."

"What do Maldito and Apolinar want?"

"To talk with Don Sebastian. A guarantee from him they can come in safety. They promise to kill every person in this house if harm comes to them."

Don Sebastian pushed up beside me. His mustachios were bristling and I've never seen such cold, aloof dignity in a man's eyes and face. But when he spoke his voice was calm.

"I'll talk with them because it will make no difference in the end. Every man taking part in the sacking of Santa Rosa today is doomed. Tell the dogs to come in safety and say what they have to say."

Arturo wheeled the Morgan around and raised himself high in the stirrups. He swung the white drawers around and around above his head and let out a shrill yell. Almost immediately the four Spaniard prisoners were pushed off the porch with their hands bound while Maldito and Apolinar Romero mounted their horses. I looked at the pale face of Maria and thought, Thank God they're not bringing Tony. Maybe I was right, after all. Maybe they were only having fun with him.

A dozen other Yaquis followed and I turned to Juanito. "Get your boys at all the downstairs windows. If they make a move kill Maldito and Apolinar first. But don't shoot until you hear me open up."

He grinned, enjoying every minute of it, and disappeared once more into the patio. Arturo whirled and loped away, apparently relieved at getting away from the stern old eyes of the patron he had betrayed. He was young and arrogant, for the moment, freer than he had ever been in his life. But he had been born on the hacienda, had lived all of his life there, and the rigid caste system couldn't be breached in a matter of hours. He loped back, paused to speak briefly with Apolinar and Maldito, then crossed the plaza.

DON SEBASTIAN and I stood there together back of the heavy black grillwork of iron and watched the little procession move toward us.

"What will be their asking price?" he said to me.

"The *Banco Minero* money, I think, *patron*. Torcuata hid the old family treasure you kept at the hacienda."

"So?"

"Didn't she tell you?" I asked harshly.

"No."

"That's why they set fire to the Hall of Bull Heads," I told him bluntly.

"Blood of the saints!" he roared at Torcuata. "My bull heads and breeding records. Both gone in flames! Come here!"

It was the first time in five years I'd ever heard him speak to her in anger.

The death of all five of his sons in battle had left only Torcuata, and the old man had held a secret pride at her mannish dress and the wild rides between Santa Rosa and the hacienda. Sitting with his wine glass he had brooded week after week because his branch of the Galindo family name was one day to disappear. But in mere hours he had cast aside his glass and was a fighting general again.

Torcuata came close in answer to the command, the long dark lashes dropping before his stern gaze. "Yes, Don Sebastian?" she said meekly.

"Well, do you deny what Don Guillermo has said?" he demanded.

XIII

SENORITA TORCUATA'S lashes lifted and I saw her chin come up. The old fire was there as I should have known it would be. Only a short time before she had been in my apartments, filled with remorse and pleading for understanding. Now the chamelon was again the flashing-eyed woman with all her old arrogance and hatred of me. And something told me I was in for more trouble than I had ever been in during the past five years. Her words confirmed it.

"Ask this gringo what happened in my bedroom today when I was alone and he came climbing through the outside window! I, alone and helpless, while his murdering Yaqui friend had assured him safe passage out of there! He tore the blouse from my body as Don Carlos Martinez tore it two nights before I was to have married Don Carlos. He crushed my nakedness to him and kissed me until the blood ran from my lips. Only the nearness of the Yaquis saved me from the ultimate disgrace a Castilian woman can suffer. He and Don Carlos, two of a kind, except that Don Carlos was drunk and can partly be excused for not knowing what he was doing. This gringo was not drunk. He was following the pattern of the *revoltosos*—during a revolution take what you want by force. He would have taken me if it hadn't been for the presence of the Yaquis."

She finished on a note of triumph, that triumph and her hatred both naked in her flashing black eyes. She strode past Mary Carlysle without speaking and I knew then why she had done this thing, and that I would pay a heavy price for having kissed Mary when we were in the patio.

Don Sebastian's black eyes seemed to pierce right through as he looked at me. He didn't ask for my side of it. I didn't attempt an explanation of the lie. She was the aristocratic daughter of a noted Spanish family and her word against that of an American majordomo was not to be questioned.

Don Sebastian said quietly. "You have my permission to remain beneath the protection of this house until the first hour after dark, because an attempt to leave now would mean almost certain death. You will never again enter it, William Sandrigan. Is that perfectly understood?"

"Perfectly, *patron*," I answered.

"Very well. And now we'll find out what these dogs want."

I turned to Mary. I could see the pain in her eyes and it wasn't hard to understand why. The kiss there in the patio had been one of sympathy for her because I had felt responsible for Jim's death. It had been hunger and loneliness for one of my own people; someone I had known since we were babies. But upstairs in my apartments we hadn't kissed again for any such reason. That had been the hunger of a lonely man for a love-starved young widow.

I started to say something, to tell her that Torcuata had lied, but she turned away and went out.

Maldito and Apolinar herded their four wretched prisoners to a stop not five feet from the heavy iron grillwork. Plicua Coloradio's face had a bloody gash on the left cheek and his white blouse was dirty and torn. Too bad, I thought, that one of those magueys hadn't gone

through his heart when I'd killed his running horse with a rifle shot.

"Well, what do you want, you murdering Yaqui dog?" Don Sebastian demanded angrily.

"Quite a number of things, old Spaniard graybeard." Maldito grinned, and shifted in José Comacho's saddle. "These men have been sentenced to death because they're Spaniards and *ricos* like you are. I understand that one of them might at one time have tied his name with your family through a marriage. You wouldn't want to see him walk on cactus with his feet slit, eh?"

DON SEBASTIAN thundered, "What do you want?"

"The money in the *Banco Minero's* vaults. Ever since the Mexicans and Indians threw you Spaniards out of Mexico those of you who remained in the new government have never ceased trying to take away our Yaqui lands. Every slaughter of the Yaquis has been at the hands of Spaniards. We've given out blood freely in every revolution, only to have more Spaniards in the new government turn on us once the fighting was over. We gave our blood to Madero, The Little Fellow in Mexico City, and on the night after old Indian killer Huerta shot him it was you rich Spaniards who gave suppers of rejoicing all over Mexico, because now the land would not have to be divided among the poor. You've grown rich from Indian labor and Indian blood, and now it's our turn.

"Today I burned your hacienda. This afternoon I want your gold for my men. Tonight I'm going to burn your home here, hang you, and take your daughter into my bed because she called me an Indian dog. Give me that money and turn over your gringo overseer, unarmed, and these men will die easily. Refuse and they'll walk on cactus with their feet slit; in plain sight. Refuse, old graybeard, and I'll slaughter every man, woman, and child, except your daughter, when we storm this house."

Don Raul Martinez straightened his thin, tired-looking shoulders and his eyes met those of the man he had avoided for two years. Grief and humiliation had aged him since that night two years ago when he had risen quietly to his feet, taken his wife by the arm, and walked stiff-backed to their coach.

There was no fear in his voice when he spoke. "Don Sebastian, I forbid you to make any such concession to these mad dogs to spare us suffering. That money will be used only to buy more guns and cause more suffering. Let them torture us. Let them find out that a Spaniard knows how to die with his lips sealed tight."

"That decision is mine, Don Raul. I hauled the guns that blew them to pieces behind the peaks of Bacatete and I'll live to do it again. I'll give them a blood bath they'll never forget! For every person who dies in Santa Rosa this afternoon I'll kill a hundred Yaquis! That is my ultimatum to you, you ungrateful Indian dog. Get on your horses and leave Santa Rosa at once. That's the only way you can save your lives and the lives of a thousand others who remained at Bacatete."

Apolinar shifted his weight and his horse stirred restlessly. He shot an uneasy glance at Maldito. This was something the big leader of the ore thieves hadn't bargained for.

"As for you, Apolinar Romero," old Don Sebastian went on harshly, "I should have turned you over to the Rurales in Durango for the murder of Jim Carlysle. I assure you that once this revolution is over you'll have the pleasure of digging your own grave and being shot into it. Now take your murdering thieves and get out of the country!"

"Well-spoken, Don Sebastian!" cried the elder Martinez. "They but bring down more wrath upon their own worthless heads."

Maldito didn't appear to be much impressed. He said sardonically, "Is that your final decision?"

"No, Maldito," I cut in. "Don Sebastian needs time to think it over. Two hours. And you need that same time to do some thinking of your own. You've got the upper hand now, but it won't be for long, because I know Carranza too well. Once this revolution is over and Huerta thrown out, Carranza will send Obregon himself—the man under whom you Yaquis have always fought—to destroy the very people to helped to win."

"All right, I'll wait two hours," Maldito said calmly. "I have plenty of time. But don't get your hopes up, Guillermo. I gave you one chance for life today and paid a debt. You won't get another."

He nodded to the four men and they went walking up the street in front of the two horses; proud and erect and without fear. I turned to Don Sebastian as two servants closed the huge, thick doors again and barred them.

"You will not again intrude yourself into my affairs," he ordered stiffly.

"I'm thinking in terms of saving lives, *patron,*" I said. "In two hours it will be dusk, and the bats will come forth by the millions from the T tunnel project Jim Carlysle drove into Duckbill Three. If we can get there under cover of darkness we'll be safe from the Yaquis."

"Bats?" he demanded incredulously. "I don't understand."

SO I TOLD him about the bats, but he stubbornly shook his head. "You forget that a Spaniard does not give up his home to the rabble. You can take the women and children and go if you wish. But I stay in this house if I have to defend it alone."

The hell you will, I thought angrily. I'd been waiting five years to pay him a debt of gratitude for what he had done for me. I was going to pay it in full. Tonight.

I went back upstairs to my apartments. Mary wasn't there. Only Maria Pizza with her eyes on the distant cantina and the whooping, yelling mob swarming and swirling around it.

"It's all right, *querida,*" I said. "He's their friend."

Those two hours passed almost too quickly, because just before the bats came forth at dusk Tony Pizza and the four Spaniards were brought from inside the cantina and shot down into the already blood-soaked soil of Mexico. . . .

In the year 1909 while the ascetic, vegetarian, and spiritualist, Francisco I. Madero, sat poring over the ouija board that had told him, "Francisco, some day you will become President of Mexico," the volcano on Mt. Colima erupted violently. For days afterward the very sun itself was obscured by dust and smoke and ashes. The better educated people in the cities knew about volcanos, but to the peon in the villages the eruption was an omen. Word had spread all over Mexico that the Lord was going to send someone to relieve their misery and hunger and that this was one of the signs.

During the following year, in 1910, the second omen came—a white ball of fire flashing across the skies so brightly its glare hurt the eyes. To those in the big cities who had learned to read the papers it was Halley's Comet, first observed eleven years before the coming of Christ, and reappearing regularly every seventy-seven years thereafter. But to the peons whose cattle lowed uneasily it had meant war and death and more famine before times would become better.

The Yaquis behind the flat-topped peaks of Bacatete saw the glare, too, and to them it also spelled out war and death and famine. It meant to them more bats to be flying in darkness, and that the Yaquis did not like. But the word had spread that a liberator of the people from the *rico* tyrants was coming, and when Madero revolted the Yaquis did not hesitate. They lit one hundred and ten blue fires on the flat tops of the peaks of Bacatete and eleven thousand of them came down through the Pass of Withered Hands to fight.

They fought well and they fought savagely, and they fought without mercy to an enemy, and when it was over Madero, The Little Fellow, was the new father of Mexico and aged Pofirio Diaz was in exile in Paris, waiting for the death which came to him in 1915. More than eight hundred Yaquis had died in the bloody fighting, but The Little Fellow promptly had signed a treaty with them at Cocorit returning all original Yaqui lands to the survivors. They had back again all their lands, but more than eight hundred new bats were in the night skies—lost souls of dead Yaquis, doomed to wander forever in darkness because, for some reason, they had been denied a home in the Yaqui heaven.

I sat here that late afternoon and looked at the five crumpled bodies and four more over on the red-stained steps of the church, listening to the sobbing of Maria Pizza in another room, and I knew that the time had come. I slung the heavy, refilled bandoliers of cartridges crisscross over my shoulders and rose.

The bats would be coming out of T tunnel in Duckbill Three at any moment now; millions of them that had taken abode there after Jim Carlysle had abandoned the project. They'd come straight over town, straight over Tony Pizza's cantina in a black, funneling mass, and I knew that no matter how drunk Maldito's men were they'd start muttering to themselves and remove their hats.

I HAD counted on that, prepared for nothing else during the past two hours. Maldito and Apolinar, of course, would not be back for another talk. The fact that those men had been shot so quickly and ruthlessly, without torture, meant only one thing. The Yaqui was getting ready for a direct assault upon Don Sebastian's house!

I put on my hat, picked up the rifle, and went down into the patios where everybody except Don Sebastian and Torcuata were waiting. Tio and Tia Galdino, Mary and a now dry-eyed Maria Pizza, Juanito Camacho and six stolid-looking vaqueros, nine Mexican women servants and five children.

Don Sebastian came from the living room into the patio followed by Torcuata. He'd slung a Mexican army saber at one hip, a pistol at the other, and carried a rifle.

"It's very quiet over among the rabble," he said in a matter-of-fact tone of voice. "I think you know why. The bats are beginning to emerge from the east tunnel."

"It's an only chance for all of us, *patron*," I said. "If you stay here you lose your life."

"I'm keeping two bullets for my daughter and myself."

XIV

RIFLES and pistols had been popping intermittently in town all afternoon. Now, as though in answer to what I had hoped could be avoided, a Mauser spoke from close by on the outside. The bullet entered through an upstairs window, slashed aslant through the top of a door jamb, came out and ricocheted off one of the basalt arches and buried itself in a bed of flowers.

Don Sebastian looked up and smiled wryly. "I was one of the Spaniards who did not hold a supper of rejoicing when Madero was executed. But on the day he entered the capitol an earthquake shook Mexico, and men like Apolinar Romero and his thieves were among those who said it was another omen. Somebody must have told Maldito about the bats. But Apolinar and his men hold to no such bat superstitions. I think that Romero and his thieves are making the preliminary attack until the bats have gone and the Yaquis can join in. You've made your plans for nothing, Don Guillermo."

More shots were crashing out now from all four sides of the huge house, and I yelled at the vaqueros to get back

near their appointed windows. I took the stairs three at a time, with Juanito behind me. Some of the children began to cry and I heard Don Sebastian roaring at them all to be quiet. We burst into my apartments again and I looked toward the plaza.

Above it was a winding, twisting dark cloud. The bats were in evening flight for a night of food hunting.

The plaza and the men jammed around in front of Tony's place were silent. Five quiet bodies in one spot and four more over on the steps of the church; and nearly two hundred Vaquis standing with their hats off, looking upward at thousands of their people doomed to wander endlessly through nights extending into eternal time.

"I don't see the little *cabrón* anywhere," Juanito's voice said from beside me.

"Who?"

"José. I wanted a shot at him."

"He's probably with Apolinar's boys."

A man broke acros the street, running hard, rifle in hand. I swung the .40-82 for a line shot but the muzzle blast from Juanito Camacho's Mauser exploded like a cannon in my left ear. He flicked out the hot shell and grinned as a man, screaming like some kind of a wild animal, began to drag himself along over the cobble stones.

"Crawl on your belly like a snake, damn you!" Juanito grunted to the distant ore thief. "Better to suffer that way than to hang later on."

From downstairs came the crash of more rifles as the vaqueros opened up, and then came the scream of a woman. Juanito rushed to the door.

"That's Felipe's wife!" he said. "He's been hit."

Most of the bats were gone northward now into the glow of a copper-colored Mexican sky and I saw Maldito yelling to his men and waving toward where we waited. I steadied the rifle on the window sill, breathed halfway out, held it, and squeezed the trigger. Almost simultaneously with the sharp kick against my shoulder Maldito gave a cry and leaped convulsively. A dozen of his men rushed around him and I drove eight more slugs into the group hoping to get him. I sat there cursing futilely and reloading as they helped him inside the cantina. Where he had stood four of his Yaquis lay stone dead while a fifth was crawling away on hands and knees, receiving no aid, asking for none.

All at once I heard the faint rattle of pigskin drums and the effect upon the Yaquis was that of command to trained soldiers. In a body they broke for their horses, and I knew then that for us the end was in sight.

Six vaqueros, Juanito, Don Sebastain and myself. Nine against at least two hundred. I was working the rifle as fast as I could shoot accurately when Torcuata came in. I glanced at her only long enough to see who it was, then turned back to the rifle. She stood beside me until it was time to refill the magazine again.

YAQUIS by the dozens were running a hard circle to surround the house from all sides and start closing in from the streets on foot. Over in another street a yellow glow that wasn't from the sunset told of somebody's house being burned.

"How much time have we left?" Torcuata asked and looked at me from luminous eyes holding a new, strange kind of gentleness.

"Half an hour or so, I guess," I said, and wondered what my stern-visaged father would say when he received the news that the son who had defected from his God and his home had been killed in the sacking and burning of Santa Rosa by two hundred red-flagging Yaquis and forty-five or fifty Mexican ore thieves.

"And now you're losing your life because, despite my taunts for two years and my lies to Don Sebastian down there in the living room a little while ago, you're making no attempt to escape alone."

A flurry of gunfire broke out somewhere over in the next street and several slugs drummed through the window beside which we stood. They thudded into the thick walls, and plaster fell.

"That's why," I said. "With the exception of the coach door every other door and window is covered with iron grillwork. If we hold out until the night is black, I'll try to save my hide, Torcuata."

"I don't believe it. You'll stay here because of last-minute loyalty to Don Sebastian. Not for me, because you hate me. But for my father."

"Not for you," I told her harshly, and meant it.

"I know. But now that there is so little time left I must tell you something. I loved you from the very hour you were brought to the hacienda and put into bed with your stomach ripped open by a third-rate Piedras Negras bull whose mother lacked courage and had been sold to a lesser breeder. I used to sleep at night dreaming of the big yellow-haired gringo being in my arms. And you were right about me striking those girls in the kitchen, poor things. You were right about my lying awake nights and staring at the ceiling with hunger and loneliness inside of me. Hunger for you, who ignored me.

"I have known, of course, during the past five years, that marriage with you was impossible. You were an American overseer and I a Galindo whose forefathers first came from Spain with Cortez. It was a Galindo who brought the first cattle to this continent in Fifteen-twenty-one. So I had no illusions. My duty as a Spanish woman was to marry a suitable husband selected for me by parents, uncles and aunts."

The big window was no longer a safe place to work a Winchester from and I didn't try any more. Both Mauser and large-caliber lead bullets droned through steadily and one of them struck a bar of the iron grillwork. It gave off a peculiar screaming sound and a pinpoint of fire burned into my left cheek. I lifted my hand and brought away blood from where a fragment from the disintegrated slug and imbedded itself below the surface of the skin.

I pulled her back still farther along the wall and looked aslant out through the window toward the south. Smoke down there a half-mile away—smoke sure as hell and coming fast. A train!

Torcuata hadn't seen. She wasn't looking out the window. She was looking up at me with those luminous eyes.

"I would never have bared my heart as you bared my bosom today, Beelie. I'd let you go on thinking I hated you because I loved you so desperately and so hopelessly. Now, in hours, the old order has changed. If we should be some miracle escape from this place tonight I'll go with you if you want me. My brothers and stepbrothers are all dead. My half-French mother is in Mexico City with another man. My father will either die or take to the field again to punish the Yaquis. If—if you want me," she finished in a low voice, "you—you won't have to tear my clothes ever again. I'll give myself to you willingly, and trust that God will not judge me too harshly."

"You might have spoken too soon, Torcuata," I said, trying to be gentle about it because I knew what an effort it must have been for her to unburden her soul and conscience. "Come on!"

WE HURRIED outside and ran along the wide inner balcony to one of the south rooms. I unlimbered the glasses again, reaching out over the housetops and pulling the yard of the railroad up close. It was a train, all right, and it was coming in fast!

Two flat-cars in front had a protective band of steel three and a half feet high bolted around the sides and ends, and in the center two of Pancho Villa's famous Krupp guns—Los Niños—captured from Federal armies. Back of the two cannons was an armored car with cooking fires pouring smoke from the port-holes. The engine next, then a long

line of cattle cars with saddled horses inside and men on top. No women and children on this one.

I'd guessed right. After Villa had driven the Federals out of Oro Grande and cut the telegraph he'd sent the train and soldiers to pick up all engines and rolling stock to transport his fighting men and supplies on southward after the fleeing Federals.

A Villa train in Santa Rosa! And no man in Mexico hated the Spaniards with such cold ferocity as the one-time pack-mule outlaw of the Durango mountains who now commanded an army of more than seven thousand men!

From down in the yard came the hoarse bellow of a steam whistle, a long series of shorts and longs that might have been some kind of a signal. I saw men pouring down in droves from the top of the cattle and box cars, lowering door ramps to unload their horses. Swarthy-faced men in big hats with rifles slung over their shoulders.

All firing had ceased at the first bellow of the engine's whistle. The glasses before my eyes wobbled as Torcuata gave a thrilled cry and grabbed my arm ecstatically.

"They're Villa's men! But they're enemies of the Yaquis! We can get away during the fight. All of us!"

"I didn't answer. I still had the glasses glued on the big man who had come walking along the side of the boiler and jumped into the second flat car carrying the *El Niño* Krupp.

He'd filled out and matured a lot during the past two years. His shoulders were much heavier and the big mustachios didn't look so ridiculous as they had the day five years before when I'd back-handed his face up by the bull pens. But there was an air of absolute authority in the way he ordered his gunners to get busy with the Krupps.

"It's Don Carlos Martinez," I said. "He seems to be in charge of Villa's armed train."

"Don Carlos?" Torcuata screamed, and snatched the glasses. "Now everything is all right, Beelie. Let's go tell Don Sebastian the good news!"

"You better tell him," I said, trying to keep my voice calm, "to get everybody out of this house in one hell of a hurry. Don Carlos' gunners are lining the sights of those Krupps right on us for some point-blank shooting!"

Then the first gun opened up with a roar, and a shell seemed to scream squarely in our faces. It missed the top of the house by inches and exploded in the belt of cottonwoods blotting out Frenchman's Pox Gulch from view. With the roar of the second gun came an ear-shattering explosion against the southeast corner, and the whole house shook.

Don Carlos Martinez, himself a former aristocratic Spaniard, either was following to the letter Villa's order to kill all Spaniards, or he was settling some kind of a grudge because of his broken engagement to Torcuata.

As I said before, strange things happened in Mexico that year.

We ran downstairs as a second shell smashed into the south wall of the house and blew an upper room door completely from its hinges, over the balcony, and down into one of the patios. Panic-stricken servants and the children were screaming in abject terror, and again Don Sebastian roared at them to quiet down. But when Torcuata told him who it was out there directing the fire the old man's curses broke out anew. He continued to curse until he stood panting and drawn, swallowing weakly in sheer apoplectic rage.

I BELLOWED at the big vaquero, "Juanito! The coach! Wheel it to the stables and hook up fast. Let's make a run for the mines."

We ran for the big vehicle and hurriedly unbarred the huge doors on the north side of the great house. It was on the opposite side from where Don Carlos' gunners were lanyarding the shells against the south wall. I thought of the elder Martinez out there in the street

beside the body of Tony Pizza and the others. Maybe it was a merciful shot that had ended the proud old man's life before he again witnessed the atavistic actions of a renegade son. We got the door open.

All around us came the thunder of Morgan hoofs and the peculiar swishing sound rawhide sandals make on cobble stones. They ran past us, within feet of us, and paid us no heed. They were not terrified; they were Obregon veterans who had been under cannon fire before. In the stables you could hear the almost human screams of horses, and out in the street men yelled and shouted orders and questions, then tried to catch the mounts they had left in order to assault the house of Don Sebastian on foot.

It was street fighting of a kind that the Yaquis loved.

Now like the trained, tough fighting men they were, they would run for the north and west side of town and gather again to await orders from their slightly wounded leader.

I heard the pigskin drums rattling again.

"The Chief! The Chief! Gather for the orders of Pluma Colorada!"

XV

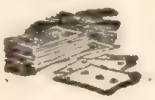
QUICKLY we got the big family coach rolled out to the stables while Tio and Tia Galindo pushed others aside and got in first among their food and wine bottles. Juanito and the vaqueros fought six terror-stricken horses into harness and held them by force until the chains were hooked into place.

The guns were still booming away, something almost sardonic in the sound, and from out of the open doorway of the big coach entrance clouds of adobe dust roiled out and enmeshed us. Choking and coughing, I got the six horses into motion, fighting the lines with a foot on the brake handle as we lunged away with the tires of locked rear wheels screeching on the cobble stones.

The devil was laughing gleefully in Santa Rosa that unforgettable night!

The dusk that comes so suddenly in Mexico during summers lay over us like a purple blanket as I shot the big coach up the street and past the church where the bodies of the nuns and the priest lay in stiffness. Though on their faces were the calm looks of those who had died without fear. This much I could

THE LAST HAND



CAPTAIN MARSH, master of the riverboat "Far West" in the Yellowstone country, was a notorious gambler, and a good one. The Captain was mightily pleased when a group of Army officers boarded his anchored vessel proposing a high stake poker game, that warm night in June of 1876.

Among the players were Captain Cromwell and Lieutenant Calhoun, but their commanding officer decided against playing, and retired to his cabin to write some letters.

The game with Marsh, the officers, and some others got underway. Heavy betting, and drinks excited the men, and several times they were asked to be quiet so as not to disturb the other men aboard. Along about dawn, the game broke up, with Captain Marsh a winner by several thousands.

"Well, you boys'll get another chance to get this back," Captain Marsh observed pleasantly.

"Yep, that's right, Cap'n. We'll get even with you," one of the officers replied. "But where we're going we don't need any money for a spell. We're heading up river to fix some of Sitting Bull's Sioux. Up towards the Little Big Horn Valley."

Then one of the soldiers reminded him. "Better go wake up the commanding officer. Colonel Custer sure don't want to be late today."

—Bob and Jan Young

see in the glare of a burning building as we flashed by.

I put the horses straight down the main street, while attacking Villa soldiers rode past us as a gallop to close in with the Yaquis. And I knew that would be the last I would ever see of Juanito Camacho for a long time—if ever again. He spun Chiao, that favorite Morgan horse of mine and a great booming roar came out of his huge chest as he rode once more with Francisco Villa's *Dorados*, the gilt-edged fighting one.

"Aiiieeeee!" came again, faintly this time, lost in the noise and confusion back there near Tony Pizza's now deserted cantina with the hundreds of empty bottles on thte ground all around the place.

The cannons had ceased their fire on the big house whose south wall was now a mass of gaping holes. I heard a bugle blowing and the spang of rifles. Too late I swung into the narrow lane leading right past the railroad yards, and thought of Don Carlos. If he saw us go into that east tunnel in the promontory of Duckbill Three I had no illusions as to what would happen to me. He'd been mean and arrogant up until the night he had staggered out of the hacienda, mounted somebody's horse, and ridden away in disgrace to fight.

But from the cold, methodical manner he'd turned his cannon on Torcuata's home it took no great stretch of the imagination to know what two years of patriot fighting for one month and plain, bloody-handed banditry the next, had done to him. He had become a mass killer without honor, without soul, without conscience.

The fact that his father and mother had been living in ragged respectibility not too far distant from the home he had shelled apparently had made little difference in a diabolical mind.

A flash of light from the engine's firebox lit up his face as we passed in the darkness within yards of where he stood beside the engine. He was laughing like a madman, hooting at escaping people clustered like flies all over the big coach.

We made the tunnel in safety. In the town behind us two more buildings, including Simon Levy's kerosene-soaked store, threw bright yellow plumes of flame high into the night.

Villa's *Dorados* wanted plenty of light in which to make one of their famous charges against the Yaquis they had fought so many times before.

I drove the big coach with its cluster of terrified humanity on top right into the wide mouth of the tunnel. The vaqueros hurriedly jumped down from their horses and held the snorting teams. Men, women, and children clambered down and were lifted down by the light of matches until Tia Galindo came up with a handful of candles from one of her baskets.

Don Sebastian, limping past, saw them but made no comment. I suppose he thought they had been brought along at the last moment instead of having been prepared hours before by the crafty old woman with that dark crop of fuzz on her upper lip.

WE FINALLY got the horses unhitched and quieted down. I turned to Don Sebastian.

"As you know, *patron*, this tunnel goes in for almost two hundred yards until it meets the cross tunnel Jim Carlysle cut through the ridge from north to south. The north entrance is close to town. Should Don Carlos discover us and decide to settle what he seems to consider some kind of a foolish personal grudge, he'll probably attack from that side and sweep the tunnel with machine-gun fire. I'm going down and throw up a four-foot wall of rocks, and I think you'd better have the vaqueros do the same here."

"I've had some experience in these matters," he informed me drily, though I could have sworn his old eyes held a slight twinkle. He added, "Very well. Do so at once."

I picked up my rifle and a damp

saddle blanket and found Mary beside me. She held one lighted candle and had another in the pocket of her light summer dress of brown. She had got hold of a rifle somewhere, too.

"I can do little good here," she said quietly. "I'm going with you to help."

Something caused me to glance at Torcuata. Here eyes were on me, a question in them I couldn't answer right then. She had loved me for five years; had offered herself to me in the event of escape when escape appeared hopeless. She'd seen me kiss Mary and, with a woman's instinct, realized that in my loneliness and Mary's past sorrow lay a hunger for affection and to give affection.

I took the lighted candle and we began working our way along the hard floor of the broad tunnel Mary's husband had planned, and found failure when he had been certain of success. A slight breeze, cool and welcome, brushed at our faces as we reached the cross-cut and turned north for another two hundred yards. The mouth of the cross-cut loomed up ahead and, out beyond it, buildings still burned and guns continued to pop. Villa's men and the Yaquis had settled down to house to house fighting in the streets.

I put the burning candle back of a boulder to shield its light from those over in town and we went out on the dump and began to carry stones. Neither of us spoke much, but the barricade grew higher and higher until at last I called a halt. We leaned against it on the outside and wiped sweat from our faces, and for some reason both of us began to laugh.

"I'll be stiff and sore for a week," she said. "I came over here to see about buying this mine, not working in it." She sobered and her face so close to mine in the darkness grew serious. "What do you think now, Bill?"

"I don't know," I told her frankly. "Whichever one is driven out of that burning town over there, the one remaining is still our enemy. And God help us all if we're discovered! Well, let me lift you over."

I slid an arm around her waist and another down around her knees. Her arm tightened around my neck and I smelled the womanly smell of her and my blood grew hot. I lifted her over, then clambered inside. If any of Don Carlos Martinez's machine-gunners tried to sweep the tunnel we could lie flat back of four feet of solid rock wall.

She spread out the saddle blanket and we sat down with our backs against rock and I pinched out the candle to save as much of it as possible. What we would do when daylight came I did not know. Keep waiting and hoping, perhaps. Certainly not run for it during the night. Leaders of both sides wanted us, and it was better to fight from a mine than be caught and slaughtered out in the open by hard-riding horsemen. I had some slight hope that the Yaquis and Apolinar's men would hit for the hacienda to eat those bulls; or that Don Carlos was under orders to collect all rolling stock in the yards in Santa Rosa and hurry back to Villa in Oro Grande.

Back to a town where a third-rate bull almost had disembowled me. Back to where I'd stood with a six-shooter in hand over two dead men and given young Don Carlos a final warning of death.

MARY'S voice beside me broke a short retrospective silence that had fallen between us.

"Poor Jim," she said in the darkness. "He was so ambitious, so unable to countenance failure in anybody, especially himself. It broke his heart, when this tunnel project failed. Any other man—any other time Jim himself would have drilled from above and made certain of what was below. But not that time. He gambled his knowledge that he could cut into the old diggings and find new ore. He lost."

"Yes," I answered her. "He lost every way, Mary. Apolinar possibly found what Jim was after and sold that same

high grade to him at the Ojuela Mine in Durango. Maybe Jim realized too late, when I sent the message, that the ore was from somewhere in the old mine. He lost more than the new find. He lost his life and left you a widow at Apolinar's hands. You can thank *me* for that!"

The rifles were still popping away steadily, and now and then a man would scream and yells would follow the scream. Another bright glow in the sky. The lumber yard was burning and, close by, so was the roof of Tony Pizza's cantina.

Mary laid a soft hand on my arm. "Don't," she whispered gently. "Thousands have died for less reason and more fault."

I slid an arm around her and pulled her over against me, felt her go tense momentarily, then a slight shiver went through her. "And don't—do that either, Bill. I—I'm only human, you know."

But the hunger of loneliness was in us both and not to be denied. I pulled her over into both arms and felt her lips warm and moist until she finally broke free and pushed away.

"No, darling, not tonight!" she said gently. "Any night but this, and nothing could stop me from loving you. But if the worst should happen, I want to meet my Creator with a clean soul."

She was right, of course, and I was the one who had been wrong. There is a saying among the Mormons that no matter how much of the outside surface is rubbed off, something of what we should have been always remains. I had lost my faith and my family, and would have lost my conscience. I had proved weak at a time when I should have been thinking of those other things I had been taught a long, long time ago. It had been Mary Carlysle's strength that had kept us on the right path.

I don't know how long we sat there, Mary and I, with her warm, soft body in the crook of my left arm. But after a while Tony Pizza's place was nothing but thick adobe walls with a mass of glowing embers inside. What had happened to his wife in the kitchen probably none of us would ever know. The flames had died down in the lumber yard, though it would smolder for days.

I tried not to think of it as Mary and I talked of those earliest days in Colonia Juarez and Colonia Diaz in Chihuahua and, later, of the years along the Bapiste River at Colonia Oaxaco. I'd been nineteen when I'd left those nine years before, and she, sixteen. Four of those years I'd spent on bull ranches and in the arena, and the last five on the hacienda of Don Sebastian Galindo. Nine years!

There in the tunnel mouth that night they seemed to have passed very quickly.

She stirred in the circle of my arm and raised herself erect, listening. "I think I heard someone calling. A woman."

I got up and felt for the candle and reached for a match. We saw a flicker of light far down the tunnel, then Torcuata's voice came plainly. I lit the candle, shielding it with my body, and we walked toward her, calling for her to wait. The bat smell grew stronger because the wind seemed to have shifted and was blowing through the south entrance of the cross-cut.

"That's strange," I said to Mary. "We didn't smell it earlier when the breeze was from the north. Now all we need is a good rain to put out the fires and then warm sun to start an epidemic from decomposed bodies lying out in the open."

TORCUATA glanced at us briefly, whatever she thought or believed now masked back of her eyes. She said, "Where's Tio and Tia Galindo?"

I stared at her. "Aren't they with you? They were!"

"They're not now, Don Guillermo. They've disappeared."

"What does Don Sebastian say?"

"He is not worried because he thought they had gone with you or were off asleep some place."

"Then he'd better start worrying," I said harshly. "You know how crazy Tio and Tia Galindo always have been about Don Carlos Martinez. So where do you think they've sneaked out to?"

"Tia's a Galindo," she reminded me a trifle coldly. "No matter how he's lived, he is still Don Sebastian's brother."

"Is he?" I growled angrily, and told her what the rotten old son of a bitch had offered me during the afternoon if I'd spirit him and his bony wife away and leave Don Sebastian to die.

"You better go on back with Torcuata," I told Mary Carlysle. "Tell the vaqueros to tear down that barricade and back the coach out on the dump. We've got to get out of here fast. The firing has died down a bit and it's my guess that Maldito and Apolinar have been driven out and are on the way back to the hacienda to fill up on bull meat and probably plan their next move. They might be getting pretty worried about themselves by now."

XVI

NO QUESTION but that both Maldito and Apolinar had damned good reason to start being worried. Ex-President Taft had ordered twenty thousand American troops to the Border before going out of office—an implied threat of intervention to any Mexican President with any idea that huge American investments below the Border would not be protected.

Huerta knew that only Washington's consent had permitted him to be chosen as President after he'd executed President Madero. And now President Wilson's new Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan, had uttered the pompous though omnious words that had sealed Huerta's doom:

"The usurpations of General Huerta are endangering the peace and security of the United States as few events have. If General Huerta does not retire by force of circumstances, then it will be the duty of the United States to take more direct action."

Huerta was on his way out, he knew it, had known it since breaking diplomatic relations with Washington. Carranza was on his way in, and even men like Maldito and Apolinar, uneducated though they were, understood what would happen to Red Flaggers who burned and sacked as had been done in Santa Rosa this night.

I said to Torcuata, "Tell Don Sebastian I'll be along almost at once."

Call it a hunch, but I couldn't get my mind off those bats! The Yaqui end of it no longer mattered, of course. I had hoped to use their religious superstitions to enable us to escape from the big house, but the sudden appearance of Don Carlos with his cannon had done much better.

Now I was remembering how Jim Carlysle had staked his reputation as a mining engineer he could find ore, had found nothing, and had been ordered to abandon the project. That had preyed on his mind to the day of his death. What had brought him to mind was the fact that I also had remembered quite suddenly when the bat smell came through, was that there had been no bats in the abandoned project when I'd first come to Santa Rosa five years before. They had been flying out of a hole on the *west* side of the mountain, where so many decades ago the old Jesuits had abandoned work.

Now they were coming out from the east end of the T project, and I knew that bats didn't change the habits of a hundred years or more almost overnight.

They had changed only during the past year—about the time Apolinar and his boys had made their secret strike and began taking out the *planchas de plata*, these small slabs of almost pure silver!

The candle flickered and nearly went out as I set off at a trot along the south part of the cross-cut tunnel through Duckbill Three.

I smelled the bat odor stronger before

I got there and stopped in front of the cave-in.

The big tunnel wasn't fully choked; in fact, not more than half. It left an opening twenty-five feet wide and six feet high, space enough for a solid stream of the little night hunters to come out by the thousands.

I clambered up over the cave-in and down again to the floor, and right there in the west wall was a huge gap that led off endlessly down into darkness. I bent and peered through. Old ladders made of tree trunks with cross pieces set in deep notches. I clambered down one to another level and saw a rawhide sack with a broad headstrap. I could picture those patient Indians climbing down from one level to another, filling the sacks with silver, fastening the headstrap into place, then beginning the long climb up one ladder after another, from one level to the other, carrying the precious metal to the surface.

But the King of Spain had been too greedy, and in anger had ordered the Jesuits back to Spain, and the richest part of their great mine had been sealed off.

Jim Carlysle's mining sense had been correct. For in moments more I knew that he had missed by less than five feet!

I BENT and picked up a new spade, with the words *"Mina de Galindo"* burned in the handle with a hot iron.

I had found Apolinar Romero's great strike of *planchas de plata!*

Small wonder he had sneered and refused a compromise to go back to work for wages after the revolution!

I moved along the level, which was circular, for this was more of a cavern with a deep pit below than a tunnel. I worked past ancient timbers, with dried bat dung deep around my knees. I knew practically nothing about mining and mining methods, but it was my guess that the old Jesuits and their Indian converts to Christianity had run a whole string of tunnels at various levels deep in Duckbill Three until they had made the rich strike in the place where I now stumbled along. I was sure of it when I went through another short stretch of tunnel and came to another cavern.

There I found new picks and shovels piled up beside at least one hundred tons of ore so rich I stood there in awe. No wonder poor Jim Carlysle had sucked in his breath when Apolinar and his boys had brought out the first pack-train load and showed it to him after the trip over the mountains to Durango!

Faint sounds came to my ears and I turned. I'd forgotten about the others out there one hundred and fifty feet above. I broke into a slogging trot through the dried bat dung and began a scramble to get back up to that gaping hope I'd come through in the tunnel wall. I climbed the last pole with its cross-trees worn smooth by bare feet long since turned to dust. My breath was coming in hard gasps as I emerged, brushed at my clothes, and started to climb back over the tunnel cave-in that had ripped away part of the wall and opened the hidden mine of long ago.

The breeze was still coming through and the candle flickered as I reached the top.

I didn't get any farther. Three hundred yards away, over the top of that rock barricade Mary and I had so laboriously built, a machine-gunner opened up with a water-cooled Maxim. A rain of slugs came slamming down the long black length of the underground passage. I knew then that Tio and Tia Galindo had got to Don Carlos Martinez and told them where I was. The gunners had come up with rifles and an *ametralladora*, found us gone, but had seen the pin-point light of my candle.

I was trapped in the main section of the T project, and I knew that by now the Galindo family and Mary were prisoners of the man to whom Torcuata had once been betrothed.

The rain of machine-gun slugs ceased and a faint voice shouted an order. Men began to advance with lanterns and from the east-west section more men

emerged and bellowed at the others.

"Hurry it up, you *cabrónes*!" called a voice I hadn't heard in two years. "He's in here some place and I want that hombre!"

The searchers came together where the two tunnels intersected, at least thirty of them, many carrying lanterns.

"No sign of him down that way?" Don Carlos demanded of the gun crew. "Then what—"

"Yes, Major Martinez. We set up the gun as you ordered and waited for you to take the prisoners hidden in the east entrance. Then just now we saw a little light far down the tunnel and fired several bursts at it. We think he's in there dead."

"Come on!" ordered the Spaniard, now one of Villa's trusted officers. "We'll soon know."

I snuffed out the candle held arms' length below the top of the cave-in. It was my two guns against thirty or so, because I had no illusions as to what would happen if Don Carlos got his hands on me. That former cruelty he had shown to horses had been transferred to his treatment of men; to enemies both personal and national.

I thought, The old sealed-off mine. They wouldn't dare follow me in.

"Señor Sandrigan!" called Don Carlos's voice. "If you're alive, come out of there with your hands in the air."

"I'm alive, and you damned well better not come any farther!" I called back.

"Better to come out now than to die in there like a mongrel dog without water and food. We've driven the Yaquis and ore thieves out of Santa Rosa and hold the town. There'll be soldiers waiting with guns at every entrance."

THERE was only one answer to that one and he got it. I stuck the half-burned candle into a shirt pocket no longer white now, slid the barrels of two .45's over the top of a rock, and drove twelve shots at that group of lanterns. The reports almost split my ear-drums and screams filled the tunnel. More guns began to crash, and lanterns fell and bullets made vicious sounds all around me as they richocheted off rocks, then ricocheted a half-dozen more times. A spent bullet struck me a hard blow in the back and I knew I had to get out of there fast.

I sheathed the guns, crawled back, and felt for the five-foot opening in the wall. My spine felt ice-cold as I waved my hands out in pitch-black *nothingness*. I crawled fumblingly to the edge, unmindful of the rain of bullets on rocks, and when I slid backward over the edge into more black nothingness it seemed a whole lifetime until my boot struck one of the cross-trees in the notched pole ladder. I went down, praying to a God I had forsaken that the ladder was well anchored. If it toppled I'd plunge end over end into that circular pit the old Jesuits had dug and shored, one level of rotting timber after another.

After an eternity my boots sank into the bat dung again, but only after I had both of them firmly planted did I let go of the cross-trees.

The candle had to be lit and I struck a match, fired it, and hurried around the circular level toward the mouth of the short tunnel leading into the *gambusinos'* diggings. I put the candle down into bat dung and punched out twelve empty shells, reloading fast.

You could hear voices now quite plainly. Martinez had rushed the barricade when he knew my guns were empty. He had found nothing. Nothing but a gaping hole in the west wall of the tunnel and a faint glow down below from my lone candle.

"Ah," came a startled voice. It boomed hollowly. "So the bird is flown. Señor Sandrigan!"

"The answer is still the same, Don Carlos," I called.

"Don Sebastian and Torcuata are my prisoners. So is the woman, Mary Carlysle. Ah, but did I hear some interesting information about you and her

from my dear Tía Galindo over a bottle of her best wine not many minutes ago! Now will you come out?"

"I don't trust a cur dog who speaks of such things when his father is sprawled dead in the streets, and his mother is hiding away in terror."

"All right, you damned peon gringo son of a bitch!" came back the feral snarl. "I called you that five years ago and my opinion is still the same. José Camacho! Go get your horse outside and bring quickly some of the dynamite my men have left from blowing open the vault of Don Sebastian's *Banco Minero.* Hurry!"

I picked up the candle and moved toward the new diggings. I knew what the concussion alone would do unless I could get far enough away. My palms were sweaty again, the way they had been around the stock and barrel of that .40-82 rifle, out there in the bright sunshine where a man at least could die in the open under a high sky. Not down in the bowels of the earth.

I kept on saying over and over, Easy now, Bill Sandrigan. Don't lose your head, and don't lose your sense of direction. Think, man, think!

I couldn't think of anything except that after the dust had settled inside my sealed tomb I'd have light for about two more hours—then darkness until the end.

I reached the new diggings and began to look around. No water or food left by the *gambusinos* who had worked by night when the bats were gone. Picks and shovels and hand drills and, ironically, dynamite which I wouldn't have known how to apply even had I found a use for it. A wooden box caught my eye and I jerked off the lid. Candles! Stolen from poor Simón Levy's store. Two of them left out of twenty-four. I stuffed them in my pockets and looked around. The bat odor was almost suffocating now.

ANOTHER of the old tunnels led off from the new diggings, and because there was nothing else to do except sit and wait for the explosion, I set off along its floor, carrying a pick and shovel. A couple of times I climbed rotted pole ladders, but the old tunnels ran on and time and direction became nothing. Not until the terrible roar came from somewhere in the bowels of the earth back in the new diggings I had left, and I knew that the new tunnel, the opening in the wall, and the piles of old shored scaffolding in the pit below now all lay buried under hundreds and hundreds of tons of earth.

I was sealed deep inside Duckbill Three, and Don Carlos Martinez was on his way back to his prisoners, the town of Santa Rosa in complete control of his rebel army.

I sat there on the lowest cross-tree of the ancient pole ladder with four inches of flickering candle in the dank earth beside my right boot, visualizing how that place somewhere back there looked now. Ironically, I thought of the bats for some reason. At daybreak they'd come winging back by the millions, pouring in in an almost solid black mass, thousands dashing themselves to death perhaps, while untold thousands more turned the T project into a squeaking, fluttering, odorous mess.

XVII

BATS! I looked down at my damp boots and swore angrily at myself for being a stupid fool. Then I jumped up and began a stumbling trot back to the diggings.

The diggings were still intact but where the great circular pit had been was nothing but rocks and fresh dirt, with the acrid odor of dynamite all over the place. With another pick and shovel and a fresh candle I set off through the largest of the tunnels. It was three feet deep in soft, dried bat dung. I followed it and others, switching from one to another but always staying with the bat dung; heading west, I hoped.

I climbed to higher levels and always

the bat dung was there, and I came at last to a much larger tunnel than the others. Up against a blank wall. But the dirt and rocks were comparatively fresh and in niches in both walls were the stubs of several candles. I sat down on a rock and some kind of a hysterical laughter took hold of me. All the ghosts of the dead Jesuits must have been awakened by my roars of laughter at what I was at last remembering.

For four years after I came to Santa Rosa the bats had left the old Jesuit diggings through this tunnel, funneling up out of a great crack in the long hill formed by great cave-ins of long ago. But when Apolinar Romero and his boys had by accident found the sealed-off strike they had shrewdly forced the bats out through the new east end opening, knowing that few people in Santa Rosa would bother to enter the abandoned T project now.

I got up and, with the shovel, went at the new opening that had been made for the bats. Forty-five minutes later I scrambled up out of a great gash in the mountain side and saw the lights of the town below.

The firing had completely stopped now, though the glow from burning and red-smoldering buildings still turned the sky bright red. I stood there covered with dirt and grime and smelling of bat dung, trying to figure out my next move. All of us now were in worse danger than ever. I well knew what Villa's orders to young Don Carlos had been regarding *rico* Spaniards found in Santa Rosa, and had not the slightest doubt but that they would be carried out. Don Sebastian would be killed, Torcuata would be taken, and no telling what would happen to Mary Carlysle.

I started down, stumbling along in the darkness with no particular aim in mind; helpless in the fact of an army of tough rebel fighters. Go back to the hacienda and hide? Wait until the fighting stopped, then begin to rebuild?

I put the thought aside. If Don Sebastian still lived he would remember what I had done to Torcuata's blouse and repudiate me. If he died she would still be around the hacienda, alone with me —me, and the memory of an old man's hands nailed to a saguaro. I thought, She was right when she said a way of life might be ending today in the fire and blood of a burned hacienda and a sacked town.

But something had ended for me today too. It came to me with a shock of surprise that I was a homeless man, with no place to go, no one to turn to, unless it was Mary Carlysle.

The lights of the fires grew brighter as I came down off Duckbill Three and entered the edge of town, circling down toward the yards where the train waited. The Krupp guns were silent, with their leather-covered snouts pointing up into the sky. Horsemen loped here and there, laughing and calling excitedly. I heard a name mentioned, followed by something else that flashed all the weariness out of my body.

I made a bee-line for the telegraph office in the station.

Eduardo Serrano was there all right and his telegraph key was clicking. His loyalty was to the railroad, not to whichever side controlled it. He looked up as I entered, staring as though he couldn't believe what he saw.

"I thought you were dead!" he gasped.

"Not yet. What's this I hear about Huerta?"

"Big news! He's fled into exile. A German gunboat, the *Ypiranga*, which also took Diaz into exile, got him away today."

SO IT was over! I stood there in the old wooden depot and wondered what to do now, feeling very much alone for the first time in my life. Normally I'd have sent a message of defiance to Don Carlos. But he was a Villa man and I knew Francisco Villa. Half of the time during the fight against Huerta's government forces he had obeyed Carranza whenever it suited him. The rest of the time he had not only disobeyed, but he'd

turned on Obregon and taken a few slugs at *him*. Now that the fighting was over they'd all probably get together and profess undying friendship in the elation over the victory which had rid Mexico of another dictator.

Carranza would stop fighting the moment he heard the news. Obregon's tough Yaquis, now that they had a promise that their land would be given back to them, would head straight for Bacatete. Zapata's soft-spoken Indian boys, who always removed their hats when asking people for food, would hide their guns and wait patiently for the land to be divided.

Villa would do as he pleased when it suited him to do so, probably wiring an officer like Don Carlos Martinez to keep on taking while there was yet a little more time.

I said, "Have any messages come through to Major Martinez from Pancho Villa?"

"Only a short time ago, Don Guillermo. He orders all fighting to be stopped immediately, and law and order restored."

It was my turn to stare. Villa had said all through the years since he had appeared at Juarez with three horses and a hundred and eighty-seven Mexican silver dollars and offered them and himself to Madero, "Let's take it away from them and divide it among ourselves."

He had idolized Madero, yet when the victory over Diaz had brought no division of spoils the way Villa had visualized, the new President had been forced to throw him into jail for a few months to cool down the surly, unpredictable leader. And somehow, in view of his distrust of Carranza, I couldn't picture him disbanding his men this second time in the face of promises.

I said, "I do not understand this, Eduardo. I thought Villa—"

He went off into laughter, twisting his head aside while he tugged at his per-per-and-salt-colored mustachios. "Our young friend Don Carlos didn't understand it either, Don Guillermo."

He got up, and he wasn't laughing now. He'd been in Santa Rosa a long time. He knew the whole story of the elder Martinez who had never been rich. Just a hacienda and some cattle, until Pascual Orozsco had come along and shot it to pieces with his cannons, then driven off every head of cattle on the place. Eduardo knew the heartache the proud old man had suffered while living in Santa Rosa in ragged respectability.

Eduardo Serrano came over and looked at me. "I took the message and ran with it as fast as an old man can run, up to Don Sebastian's house," he stated quietly. "Yes," he repeated, at my look of surprise, "that's right. With his father lying dead in the streets and his mother cowering away in terror, Major Martinez took his prisoners to their own home he'd shot up with cannons. Drinking wine with Tio and Tia Galindo. They were laughing about something in connection with Torcuata and the wedding. Two years ago. It seems that Don Sebastian's brother made all the arrangements with the understanding that young Don Carlos would one day divide the Galindo family fortune with Tio Galindo. Now such a marriage will no longer be necessary. With the death of Don Sebastian *and* his daughter, Tio Galindo does the dividing. I know this thing to be true because I overheard it, then kept a straight face before delivering the message. I did this to save my life. I tell you this because I know of your loyalty to Don Sebastian."

"How could that message from Villa, stopping the fighting, cause Don Carlos Martinez not to understand?"

"Because he's mad for money and power. He said that Villa took four million dollars' worth of baled cotton alone from the Spaniards in Chihuahua City, as well as a million dollars in gold from the Terrazas family, and their land and horses and cattle. And now Don Carlos has this town in his hands, all the money from the *Banco Minero*,

and right in the midst of it Francisco Villa wires him to restore. He was cursing angrily when I left."

I REACHED for a telegraph blank and pencil. I said, "He won't like this new one either, Eduardo."

"You're telegraphing Pancho Villa?"

"That much more time cannot be wasted, Eduardo. I'll write the message and sign Villa's name and you deliver it. If Don Carlos should learn the truth you tell him I forced you to do it at gun point, on pain of death."

I wrote the message. It said, in effect, that Villa had received a wire from an American, William Sandrigan, whom Major Martinez had that night tried to kill, saying that Martinez was also holding prisoner another American, a woman, and two Spaniards.

I added that the war was over and ordered an immediate release of the three.

"Take that up to the house at once, Eduardo," I told him. "And you'd better pray to the Virgin Mary that he's not mad dog enough to refuse to obey. Hurry!"

I went out into the night again. A short distance away four saddled horses were outlined, their riders probably having gone on in to fight on foot. I got the best one, loped out of there, and headed straight for the house again.

I was not thinking about Torcuata and Don Sebastian now. But I was concerned about Mary Carlysle. I rode up as though I were another Villista and swung down.

I thought suddenly, What the hell am I doing here anyhow, with Juanito Camacho around? He'd never let harm come to them if he had to kill Don Carlos himself. Even if he is fighting for Villa.

No sentry challenged or paid any heed to me. They were squatting around on their haunches and chattering about details of the fight. I checked my guns to make sure, then went inside through the coach door. The dust odor had disappeared but debris was piled all over the patio in shattered disarray, and I could see reddish skies through holes in the south wall. I looked around for a place to wait for Eduardo to come pantingly with the "message from Villa." A place from which I could see and hear what took place, then kill quickly in case Don Carlos grew rebellious and disobeyed.

Lights showed from the huge living room facing the street, and I stumbled across the debris-littered patios toward them. In the darkness that suited me right now, it would be easy to wait and look through the curtains until Eduardo Serrano delivered the message at the front door.

But the devil was still laughing at Santa Rosa that night and I never made it. A door opened suddenly and three people stepped out. Don Carlos with an arm around Maria Pizza's waist and traitorous old Tia Galindo herself. She gave a single scream and pointed as the light fell full on me. I got a gun clear all right but the women were beside Don Carlos and my eyes wouldn't take the sudden glare. I made a leap to one side as his gun roared. The bullet struck me with burning fire and shock and my knees buckled. I was going down when the second one caught me, and this one didn't hurt so much.

Light and sound were blotted out and I lay sprawled face-down on the stones while the devil must have been slapping his thigh and roaring with laughter. . . .

The first thing I knew after that was a sense of being in dim light and of somebody was moving through it. My ears were ringing loudly as they sometimes did following a night of too much coffee and mezcal and cigarettes. It took an effort to get my eyes open, then a cool hand was placed soothingly on my forehead.

"Well, Don Guillermo, I guess you are going to recover eventually, though it will be a long time."

"What happened after he shot me?" I asked. I should have felt weak, but for some strange reason I didn't.

MARY said, seating herself beside me, "So many things I hardly know where to begin. Luckily I got to you in seconds and stopped the flow of blood while they were inside reading a message from Villa." She smiled at that one. "Eduardo Serrano told me who sent it. Don Sebastian reacted automatically. He had Eduardo get an engine and coach ready to see about Carranza punishing the Yaquis."

"Did Torcuata go with him, Mary?" I asked.

"Yes," she answered simply, and I thought I knew why. "Don Carlos went into a wild rage, and you can imagine how Tia Galindo screamed and shrieked. He took her and Tio Galindo and Maria Pizza and left, swearing to turn Red Flagger. Bill, imagine those two, Maria and Don Carlos, leaving together while their fathers lay in the streets!"

"It's war, Mary. Such people are fiery, and in some ways childish."

"At the moment, the town is quiet except for the people who have emerged from their hiding places. They're piling the dead and burning them with oil to prevent an epidemic. You're in Don Sebastian's bedroom in his town house, and somehow I think you belong here."

I stayed in the big house alone with Mary Carlysle for over a month. I'd probably saved her life by that fake telegram from Villa, and she undoubtedly had saved mine by quick action before I bled too much. And I didn't find out until the month was up that both Torcuata and Don Sebastian thought I was dead.

XVIII

FORMERLY in the throes of a blood bath, the country where I had been born was now in confusion. All the Federal armies had been disbanded and the rebel troops formally recognized. But a hundred different "Generals" still had their armies, ranging in number from a hundred men to Villa's seven thousand, and most of them were dissatisfied with the petulant, despotic Carranza. It had been all right to recognize Old Graybeard, during the revolution, as First Chief of the *Revoltosos*. But the American Government, following previous custom, was holding up the granting of a new loan until Washington could decide who should be the new President, wanting a man to protect American investments.

Around the great sugar plantations in Morelos, Emiliano Zapata steadfastly refused to disarm his boys until the land was divided—right now. Villa was amiable and agreeable enough, but growing restless from inactivity. Obregon, the Sonora rancher, studied military and political subjects, which later was to make him one of Mexico's greatest Presidents.

So it was one thing to have recognized Carranza as First Chief, and who now viewed himself as the Father of Mexico. It was another to promise and then follow the old Mexican axiom—"Observe—do not fulfill."

To the strikers in the cities, to the demonstrating students in the streets, to the now ungagged press, and especially to the many generals who had helped him Carranza sent back always the same message:

"Obey—and wait."

He said it once too often to a now surly, angry Pancho Villa, and Villa turned on him in savage fury. Carranza told Obregon to go after the rebel.

Thinking of all these things I lay in bed or sat around the house in a strangely deserted Santa Rosa. I knew then that the fighting was not over, the revolution not ended. A new one was beginning and this one might go on for years.

On that particular morning I made up my mind.

"Mary, I'm going home," I told her. We were having breakfast together as usual in the kitchen with the big holes still in the walls.

"I know," she said quietly. "I've seen it coming lately. I could read it in every

word you spoke of Mexico, in every move you made. You've been able to ride somewhat lately, but you've never been to the hacienda or the mine. Something beside Hacienda de Galindo was burned out that terrible day and night that so much happened. You once asked me if a man can ever go back. I said he could if he wanted to badly enough. But you don't want to go back to burned-out ruins and take up life. Alone."

She was referring to Torcuata, believing I loved the girl who, even though unwittingly, had caused an old man's hands to be nailed to a saguaro.

I changed the subject away from myself. "What about you, Mary?"

"I've been waiting for you to recover so that I, too, could go back to the folks."

The trains were running spasmodically now, while the quarreling and fighting among the malcontents continued. I bought Mary's ticket to the Border, at Nogales. From there she could go sixty-six miles north to Tucson, then a hundred and twenty-three miles down to her folks at Douglas.

My own route didn't lead that way. I got off one afternoon at a little adobe station, and Mary got off with me. It was Sonora desert country again and it had been a long time since I had been back this far north. We stood there a little awkwardly while the Sud Pacifico engineman took on water in the dirty tender.

She looked a little tired and hot, but she was still beautiful.

"Take good care of yourself," she said gently. "This is not too far from Yaqui country, you know, and you're riding alone. And don't forget the Red Flagger outfits like those headed by Don Carlos Martinez and his former Villistas. Obregon is beginning the pressure northward on Villa, so promise me one thing. If more fighting breaks out up here like it was down in Santa Rosa, come north across the line and let them fight. I hope you find conditions some better at Colonia Oaxaca."

SHE raised on tiptoe and kissed me good-by and I felt the old familiar surge of fire in my veins. We had never again mentioned that night in the tunnel of the T project, never kissed again. The hunger and loneliness was still there, but something had happened; too many things had changed.

I stood there in the bright, burning sunlight and watched the tail end of the dirty train grow smaller along the twin rails leading northward. Across the dusty street four decrepit-looking horses stood in front of a small adobe cantina. I crossed over and went inside into the odor of stale beer and mezcal and pulque.

It didn't take too long, because the big bull-necked *cantinero* was an Obregon man who, with his wife and children, wasn't many weeks back from fighting. The horse and saddle he no longer needed had come from a rancho and were first rate. With a blanket, canteen of water, some food, and a good Mauser rifle which the ex-*revoltoso* also no longer needed, I headed eastward into the desert. The sun was still a long way up there when registered in hours, and I pushed the rugged bay horse along, a growing impatience gripping me.

Nine years now since I'd left Colonia Oaxaca. I hadn't realized, as the years passed, how long the time. But impatience was there now, and I knew I had been away too long. Santa Rosa and the hacienda seemed a long time ago in the past and I was thinking of Torcuata and Don Sebastian. I had heard no word of them since that terrible night we'd all never forget. They thought me dead, and there was the possibility that Don Carlos had killed *them* down there in the railroad yards.

The bay slobbered a sneeze and trotted on, and his neck grew damp. The sun swung over and shadows lengthened, and it grew a little cooler. I could see a faint moon now, which would be high in the sky when night came.

I was within sight of familiar hills when darkness came down, and it wasn't

long after that when I topped a ridge and looked down upon what had been my home. It was all there—the Bapiste with its belt of cottonwoods along each side where we kids had fished and climbed trees when were too young for heavy work; the wide, orderly streets and lanes so carefully laid out; the church and other larger buildings, and then the homes.

Now all that could be seen was one tiny point of light somewhere down below as though one of the ghosts of the departed had returned. Here had come Red Lopez, the half-breed, who had gone on to storm Agua Prieta, Sonora, got himself drunk after the victory, and had been shot against an adobe wall while half passed out; Salazar the Cruel with his smiling mouth, who made promises, and had a mocking voice that said later, "Oh, but they were only promises." Pancho Villa had been driving south and now, after the years, was being driven northward again. Ghosts out of a past I had known, a past to which I was returning.

A dog barked and that light down there winked out.

I rode down a long lane where the barbed wire long since had been stripped from our posts and carried away . There were no more orchards now. Nothing but stumps left by men bent upon destruction.

Mexico is the mother of foreigners and the stepmother of Mexicans! Drive out the foreigners! Kill the gringos! Cry viva!

Broken sewing machines and music boxes out in the trash- and dung-filled streets. Broken and burned furniture and gaping windows.

I rode up toward the back of our circular cow and horse lot of adobe brick. The sheds seemed to be intact, though the roof of the main barn had been fired. The dog barked again and from somewhere back of the adobe wall came a sharp voice of command:

"Alto! Quien es?" (Stop! Who is it?)

"William Sandrigan," I said in English, and thought, What the hell? It's been nine years since I've heard Jason's voice but I know it.

"Who?" came back.

"Bill Sandrigan. Jason, could that be you after these nine years?"

"Aye, it's me," came back the ponderous voice of my brother. "I'll open the gate."

I RODE on over and saw a big man with the heavy bones and muscles of the soil worker; bearded like our elders had been. He'd be about thirty-three by now. He looked fifty. He shook hands in about the same way he would have had I been gone nine hours instead of nine years.

I unsaddled the bay and let him roll in the powdered dung. No milk cows in tonight, the first time I'd ever seen that around the Sandrigan home. There was one other horse, saddled, and tied beneath a shed.

"Mine," my brother said. "Carl and Ezekiah's are at the house while they sleep."

"How many people are left?"

"Twenty-five of us are down from Arizona as guards until the givernment is stabilized and those who wish can return to their homes."

I had slung the Mexican saddle over astraddle of the fence top and was removing the small blanket roll containing food. "What about the old man?" I asked. "Is he coming back?"

"Our father," he corrected me, "will not return to Oaxaca, William. He was born in Salt Lake the year our people founded the city. He helped his people establish the first home there, then left because of persecution. He spent ten years at Colonia Diaz to establish again. Eighteen years ago he was forced to remove again and start all over here in the wilderness that was Oaxaca. Now you see what has befallen us. He will farm near Douglas where there will be no more persecution, no more revolutions. He's an old man now, you know."

I caught the reproof in his voice. I had half expected it.

I went inside to meet two more of my six brothers.

It wasn't much of a reunion, and that part was good. Just three big, stolid-looking, bearded soil workers, and another who looked like a Mexican bandit. They saw my two guns and they later saw fresh bandages applied to wounds still tender and painful. I met the others, men I had known a long time ago, and we tried to be casual.

My shoulder and side healed in time, and I put away my vaquero clothes and put on plain ones and heavy shoes. I had a sudden, burning desire to work, to get my hands back to grip with the soil. And I remembered with a start what I almost had forgotten these past months—that no matter how much you rub off the surface of one of us Mormons you'll still find a lot left underneath.

I went down to one of the grass- and root-choked irrigation ditches one morning and went to work. It was good to feel a spade bite into the damp soil, and I remembered one other thing, too. I had said to Mary, "Am I fitted to go back and dig irrigation ditches again?"

I was digging them.

My wounds healed and my beard grew and soon I was one of them once more. Some of the men made occasional wagon trips the seventy miles to Douglas to see their families and bring back supplies. New windows and doors and lumber and barbed wire. We roofed the barn again and strung wire around the orchard, and replanted where the stumps had been. No one thought of staying in bed until daylight, and none thought to stop until darkness forced it. We were builders again as we had been since the beginning of our faith and way of life. Work hard and honestly, daily devotion, no blasphemy and liquor and tobacco and violence. No violence unless we were hit by more raiders.

I listened to the daily devotion of my three slow-speaking brothers and smoked, and now and then let go with a curse. My mother and father and Mary Carlysle were over there across the Border where I had never been. I lay awake nights or stood my part of the guard and thought of them, and of Torcuata, and I could feel some new restlessness beginning to make itself known. I had neglected to write to Mary and send it by one of the wagons.

ALL that winter I stood it, and on into the following spring, and then when the warm weather broke I couldn't stand it any more.

"We had hoped and prayed that by now—" Jason began, that warm morning, and then stopped as though he didn't know what else to add at that moment.

My yellow beard was gone and so were the clodhopper clothes and shoes. I tied on the food pack back of the cantle, hung the dripping canteen, and shoved the Mauser into its boot. We shook hands in silence and from the saddle I looked down at my three bearded brothers.

I said, "I think the old man was right. You ought to move across the line, too. Right now all the other generals except Villa have finally decided in favor of Carranza. That is also with the approval of the American Government, which chose between Old Graybeard and Pancho, and endorsed the politico. Villa is bitter against all Americans now because of it, and he's being slowly hemmed in up here in the northern deserts. If he hits this place you men probably can expect no mercy. He'd kill you in a moment in the hopes of bringing American troops in after him to start fighting the Federals who used to fight with him."

"Then you are going to Douglas?" Jason asked ponderously.

"I don't know where the hell I'm going," I said half irritably, because it was true.

But when I turned the horse's head it was south.

XIX

GRAVELY I walked the bay through the deep sand along the river banks where I had played as a child. I could see replanted fields and orchards and straight lines of fence poles where the barbed wire had been. Everything was there except the wire, the herds of domestic stock—and people. I was lonelier than I had ever been before, and something was pulling me back to where I had spent the last five years.

And anyhow, I thought, a restless man without ties has to go some place.

The country through which I rode along was in the worst shape in Mexican history. More than one hundred different kinds of currency was being printed, some of the generals carrying their own presses from town to town and forcing merchants and farmers to take it. The railroads had been blown up, repaired, and then blown up again.

Graft was riot in Carranza's office, and now it was becoming the best thing to be a guerrilla fighter. Hungry strikers and hungry students fastened themselves onto any army that swept through, found themselves women, and lived like gypsies. Obregon was still pushing Villa toward the northern deserts, preparatory to hemming him in.

In the midst of all this I rode into a newly looted little town one day and came across Don Carlos Martinez once more.

It wasn't a pretty sight, even by the standards of the time. Campfire ashes everywhere. Horses and tire tracks everywhere. Hides and horns and hoofs of freshly slaughtered cattle now fought over by buzzards and cur dogs, and all swarming with black flies. Here and there a body in the street; and old pock marks in the adobe walls gave proof this wasn't the first time these people had suffered.

I found the *alcalde* out at the cemetery supervising the digging of several new graves. He stood there and leaned against a white wooden cross of tree limbs and shrugged his shoulders while the peons eyed me with sullen, beady eyes. I had made the mistake of asking how long since the raiders had left.

"What difference does it make, señor?" the mayor pleaded. "Just go on and rejoin them and leave us alone. They asked for gold and there was but little hidden away. It was procured by torture. Nine dead. Four girls and several of our youths went with them. Carlos Martinez left only his woman who is very sick.

"Where?" I demanded quickly.

He pointed vaguely down the street. "House of a midwife."

I finally found the place, a dirty hovel built inside a circle of maguey plants. Not much chance of this woman of Don Carlos's being anyone I had even known, I thought, as I got down before the frightened eyes of an old crone with a black *rebozo* over her head. He'd have had a dozen other women by now.

One glance at the woman sitting inside told me differently, however. Maria Pizza. She didn't look like the Maria of last summer. Above the great swell of her body the once sparkling eyes were sunken and listless. She stared at me dully, and looked as though she had been crying for a week.

"Maria," I said softly.

"Was my father buried properly by the Church?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes," I lied. "And your mother, too." Tony had been burned in oil and her mother had never been found among the ashes of the cantina. "Where is Don Carlos heading for?"

She shifted position on the wooden box and her swollen young body rolled sideward. A wisp of black hair dropped down over her unhappy, sick face and she brushed it aside with a dirty hand. She was barefooted, her dress in rags. She'd been cruelly neglected for months by a cruel man.

"You're sure another priest was brought to replace the dead one?" she insisted.

"Of course," I said a little sharply, re-

membering again how she'd left town with Don Carlos at a time when her father's body lay in the dirt in front of the cantina. "Now tell me where he goes?"

"To Hacienda de Galindo. For the Señorita Torcuata. Why else do you think he would leave me here like—this?" She placed a hand over her swollen body. "He will be safe there now that the big battle has been fought in Santa Rosa."

BIG BATTLE! I thought, My God, not again after what happened last year!

She was crying now, weeping like a child. Another of thousands like her swept up in the passing of a revolution. Then I placed a comforting hand on her shoulder.

"I want to go home, Don Guillermo," she sobbed. "I want to go home to Santa Rosa!"

"I have gold that will take you home. But tell me first about the battle."

"They fought in Celaya for three days and many, many of Villa's *Dorados* were killed by the Yaquis and their women. Villa retreated to Santa Rosa and they fought again. A bomb blew off the right arm of General Obregon. He has but one left."

I began to get the picture as to what Don Carlos had done since that night the previous summer. He'd turned Red Flagger while the generals wrangled, and Carranza's friends high in the new government looted from easy chairs instead of the back of a horse. When the final showdown had come between General Obregon and General Villa cagey Don Carlos, the Red Flagger, had with his small army of looters swept into the vacuum left by the two big armies, concentrating on small towns away from railroads.

Towns like this one here, with its sorrowing *Pacificos*, or, as they were called, the peaceful ones.

I left five gold double eagles in poor Maria Pizza's moist, dirty palm and went out to my horse. Obregon* had whipped Villa on northward from Santa Rosa and now probably sent his army, the core of which always were the Yaquis when he needed them, to continue the pressure. And now Don Carlos was on his way to rest up in safety at Hacienda de Galindo, four miles from the smashed and burned town where his father had died and his mother now lived alone.

I swung into the Mexican saddle and drove the big bay into the southwest at the best pace a good horse could maintain for fifty miles. . . .

I spotted them about three that afternoon—a long column raising desert dust into the burnished Sonora sky. About one hundred and twenty-five riders. A string of wagons and buggies piled high with goods that had been looted. A water wagon with kids clustered like bees all over it. One lone hack was driven by a man, and a bony woman I was certain had nice, dusty fuzz on her upper lip. Tio and Tia Galindo had gambled once too often and, for the moment at least, they had lost again.

The binoculars pulled Don Carlos's entourage up close enough for me to recognize José Camacho and Arturo Felix among the tough-looking group in front. Somewhere along the line they had left Maldito, and had wound up with Villa's deserting Major Ramirez.

I lowered the binoculars and sent the big bay horse on toward Hacienda de Galindo.

It made me all sick inside to see the place again where once Don Sebastian had sipped at his Oporto in the patio. I rode past three miles of unplowed, weed-choked fields and up to where the manor house had once gleamed so resplendently. Nothing now but two thick adobe walls one hundred yards in length,

* It is believed by many that Obregon's real name was "O'Brien" and that he was an Anglo-Mexican adventurer. He could trace his Maya Indian blood back for generations, the one reason why the Yaquis would fight under his leadership and no other after he became a revolutionary leader.

the roofless rooms gaping emptily toward the sky like the ruins of some prehistoric Indian dwelling from which people had vanished hundreds of years ago.

Not a soul in sight. The doors of the church hung open, and I swung down and went inside to look around. Something made a scuffing sound and I had the .45 out by the time the woman began to whimper. I sheathed it and strode down the aisle. Two insane eyes peered up at me from beneath a bench. Florenza, the daughter of aged Salvatore Dominguez. He whom Maldito had shot down that day when the Yaquis came.

"Come out, Florenza," I ordered, and lifted the bench aside. "It's Don Guillermo."

She was so big and heavy it was necessary to help her up. But the dregs of terror were still there and she continued to tremble.

"Where is Padre Leonardo?" I asked.

She shook her head. "I do not know. All gone—somewhere. I was sick and could not go."

"Torcuata and Don Sebastian?"

"She was here once. Long time ago. I do not know. There was much fighting in Santa Rosa. Perhaps she is there now."

"Don Carlos Martinez is coming to the hacienda by sundown. He—"

SHE brightened and smiled, and I knew then that since my absence she had lost more than an aged father. Those of her nine children not dead, both the older boys and girls, either were off fighting somewhere or were *soldaderas*; swallowed up in the revolution.

She interrupted me with a laugh. "Don Carlos! Of course. He was here once before hunting for the señorita. He gave me a piece of gold. Now he has come for her again, but she is not here."

"You tell him she is in Santa Rosa," I ordered. "In the big house. And that I have gone to fight with Obregon."

It had been Don Carlos's turn the last time. It was going to be mine now.

I mounted that rugged bay horse and went down the long lane, up the familiar slope to the ridge. Past two hands, now withered, nailed to saguaro; one with the index finger missing. *Cry viva!*

In the bright evening moonlight the bay's hoofs echoed hollowly as I clattered past the deserted home of Serafina Mendoza and rode on into town. I could see the blackened piles that were burned bodies, the burned-out shells of the buildings, and the stench of death hung in the air. Here and there I saw a light, but not many .

An old lady in a black dress, tall and erect, walked along slowly with a package under one arm. She looked up with that fear seen in the eyes of all women these days, then smiled faintly in recognition.

"Ah, Don Guillermo Sandrigan from Hacienda de Galindo! You have been away these long months now."

"The war, Señora Martinez."

"Yes," she sighed. "It will take many years to rebuild again, and I am old and I have no family now."

Was she hinting as to the whereabouts of her son? Or was she telling me that, to her, he was also dead, like his father? She didn't ask and I didn't mention that I thought he would be in shortly. But that vicious Red Flagging son had abandoned Maria Pizza this same day and by now he would have the false word that Torcuata was back at home in Santa Rosa.

"Have you had word of Don Sebastian?" I asked Señora Martinez.

"Yes, he was here with General Obregon's army during the big battle with Villa's men. General Obregon suffered the loss of his right arm from a hand grenade. His troops are still after Villa, but they are now in charge of General Don Sebastian."

"And the Señorita Torcuata?" I asked, and felt my pulse give a surging beat.

But the old lady only shook her head. I half reached for my saddlebags and

the gold coins in it, but couldn't bring myself to do it. She'd prefer hunger. I raised my sombrero and rode on to the big house.

It appeared to be deserted as I swung down and led the horse into a patio which obviously had been used as a stable. Pack rats scurried through the debris and I could smell the sweat and salt of men and horses. But no lights showed.

"Torcuata!" I called, and waited.

I called again, louder. Still no answer.

I left the horse and went into the great living room. A candle was on a table, set in the lid of a tobacco can. I lit it and looked around at empty bottles and odorous tin cans and hundreds of corn-husk cigarette butts on the thick carpeting. No use to think of that now. I carried the light up to the bedroom where Mary Carlysle had brought me back to health. It was in shambles. She'd said that I belonged in this bedroom, meaning with Torcuata. But Torcuata was gone, and Mary was far to the north.

I went downstairs and placed the candle near the remains of a front curtain so that it would show dimly and invitingly to an eager man hurrying in from the direction of the gulch.

XX

HE WAS NOT long in coming. He'd left his troops and wagons and ridden on ahead with a small escort of picked men, hoping to find Torcuata at the hacienda. Old Florenza had given him a message that must have made his heart jump with elation. I heard the sharp sounds of iron ringing on cobble stones as he and José Camacho and Arturo Felix loped past the front and dismounted before the patio door.

"Hey, look, Major!" called José's voice. "A horse in here!"

"And a light in the living room! Come on. I must not keep by little dove waiting any longer."

I heard them coming and that old chill was in my belly as the door opened. He stood there in shocked surprise, cruel black eyes roving around the room and not finding what he sought. They swept back to mine and he smiled, his teeth white beneath the huge mustachios.

"Ah, I should have known, gringo," he said softly. "She is not here."

I said, "No, but today I saw the woman who is to bear your child, and tonight I saw your mother. And you're standing almost on the spot where you put two bullets into me last summer."

I had one gun out and it began to boom, and so did another. I drove one into his belly and killed Arturo with a second as José screamed and cowered. I put the third one six inches above the first as Don Carlos staggered backward through the doorway, back to the very spot where I had lain. He tried to writhe up off his back and I viciously put two more into the upswept mustachios I once had back-handed up there by the bull pens so many years ago.

I swung on José.

"Don't!" he whimpered. "Don't kill me, Don Guillermo!"

"I'm not going to," I told him harshly. "Your brother Juanito is waiting to do that if he's still alive. Where's Maldito and Apolinar Romero?"

"With Obregon's army," he whimpered. "I should have stayed with them, because Maldito promised the general that if—if the government would forget what was done in Santa Rosa he'd use his two hundred Yaquis and the ore thieves to help in the fight against Pancho Villa."

I thought bitterly, My God, what next can happen in a devastated country skinned to its bared, bloody ribs?

Old despotic, bull-headed Carranza once had roared, "A revolution compromised is a revolution lost," and stubbornly refused to make an exception. General Alvaro Obregon, now somewhere in one of his hospital cars with a right arm blown off at the shoulder, might have thought so, too, at times.

Certainly no compromise with a man like Pancho Villa, who at the moment, was on the run. But Obregon was a practical man. The damage was done in Santa Rosa and God alone knew how many dozens of other towns like it, and Maldito was one of his veteran gunners who could bring in two hundred more tough Yaqui fighters.

I said to a disarmed and now frightened José Camacho, "I'm going back to the hacienda and tell those people that their Red Flagger leader is dead and that they'd better scatter before a Federal army catches up with them and slaughters the whole bunch. You better scatter, too, you yellow-livered young pup."

"But where will I go, Don Guillermo?" Like unfortunate Maria Pizza he had but one thought in mind now. "I want to go home, Don Guillermo. I want to go home!"

I slapped him down hard, then kicked him in the face. He was still down when I stepped past the body of Don Carlos Martinez on his back in a pool of blood and went out to mount a *revoltoso* horse that was making me forget Chico.

I let the weary animal take its time on the four-mile journey back to the hacienda. From where Juan Pablo's withered black hands were nailed to the saguero I could see a few fires. Most of the people over there were asleep.

I rode up to the big kitchen patio on the southwest corner of the walls and still standing basalt arches. No laughing women and girls sitting beneath the palms and gossiping while they cut and prepared food for the huge kitchen stoves. Only dark bundles that were sleeping women and children on the stones beneath the arches.

A DOZEN or more men looked up as I swung down and strode in close to the fires. They didn't know who I was, but Tio Galindo did. He rose and came forward eagerly with an outstretched hand, gray-bearded, and as dirty as the rest of them.

"Why," cackled a wine-sodden voice in gleeful surprise, that of his crone wife, "it's our dear Don Guillermo back from the dead!"

I looked down at the group around the fire. "Don Carlos Martinez is dead," I told them bluntly. "I shot him less than two hours ago in Don Sebastian's house in town. You've looted and killed and done many other bad things, but so have others in time of war. It's over now, though, and if you value your lives you'll leave this place and scatter back to where you came from."

"Back to what, señor?" asked a tall, middle-aged vaquero. "Back to die of hunger?"

"Better that than your backs against an adobe wall. I came to save your lives. I killed the man who was leading you to death. Now I come as a friend to warn you to flee or die."

I looked at dirty old Tio Galindo, he who was now paying the price for his sordid life. He looked a lot different from the wine-guzzling "aristocrat" who had come into my room with a wine glass in hand to plot his brother's death.

I said, "I'm going home to my own people, so there is little likelihood that Don Sebastian and I shall ever meet again. But if that should come to pass it will give me great pleasure to tell him that somewhere in Mexico you and the old crone there are wandering in a hack drawn by a pair of skinny mules. *Adios, señor.*"

I left him trembling, and his wife whimpering drunkenly.

The next morning I began the long journey home.

There was little else I could do or cared to do now. Maldito and Apolinar were out of my reach, Federal soldiers serving in the same army with General Sebastian Galindo—and who could answer *that* one! My only chance to kill both Maldito and Apolinar as I so fervently had hoped now was gone, unless I joined Obregon and killed the two during a battle.

I wanted no more fighting. No more

scenes of death and destruction and human suffering.

Nothing but the peace and quiet of the river and those greening fields and newly painted homes.

One afternoon I rode down the same lane I'd come down on a moonlight night the previous summer. Now new barbed wire was on the fences, there was the green of fields and the beginning of new orchards. Below me, as the worn-out, lean-bellied bay horse plodded on with his head drooping, our white house gleamed like a jewel in the sun, meaning —thank Almighty God!—that we hadn't been raided again by outlaw bands. I thought of what I had left at Hacienda de Galindo and the contrast here, even in spite of my own ragged appearance, was beautifully startling. Newness in the midst of destruction; plenty in the midst of starvation.

A lone cork of prosperity floating on the dark waters of poverty.

Something I hadn't felt before swept through me and I knew how good it was to be home again.

The reunion was about the same as before. Three solemn handshakes from my bearded, well-fed brothers. Three pairs of eyes registering nothing at sight of my rags and the two guns.

I went back on the irrigation ditches that were soaking the green fields with blankets of water this time, and my beard grew once more as the summer passed. We harvested a limited crop that fall and buried the grain deep in underground cellars and watched the horizons for the locusts of war to return.

I put down restlessness, and the revolution to me was a thing of the past, far away.

Very far away until the day Pancho Villa's still formidable army padded and rolled by without bothering us this time, winding across the desert to occupy Agua Prieta, Sonora, a half-mile across the Border from Douglas and our people.

And the old restlessness burned into a new flame and the old memories came back, and I knew I had to go just this once more.

I HAD to go because Federal troops now waiting for Villa were under the direct command of Generals Plutarco Elias Calles and Don Sebastian Galindo. Because in a battle I could get at the other two men I was still determined to kill.

General Francisco Villa's two great essentials for winning wars had been his massed charges by *Dorado* cavalry, with the dreaded night attack—hit them from one side and break through over them. If that failed, turn tail and divert them while *muchachos* came trotting forward on foot to take them from behind.

He'd made headlines in Europe by whipping armies commanded by men trained over there until General Alvaro Obregon solved the problem with his tough Yaquis. Each Yaqui dug a trench hole according to the size of his family, each of whom shoved him one reloaded gun after another as the *Dorados* charged. If the man was killed his wife took up the rifle while the children did the job of reloading.

Obregon, however, had gone further than that. He, too, knew how to send in a false cavalry charge, except that his fleeing horsemen swung in a circle and let the Yaquis cut into the *Dorados* with a murderous cross-fire which often became sheer massacres.

When the first retreats had begun, the morale of the Villista soldiers suffered the first rude shocks. After the savage three-day battle in Celaya and then another in Santa Rosa, Villa turned his face northward, knowing Obregon was planning to corral him somewhere in the arid wastes of the northern deserts and possibly annihilate him completely.

With that knowledge in mind the man who had lost his eleven trains, most of his six thousand horses, and over two-thirds of the nine-thousand-man army that had won such brilliant victories at

Gomez Palacio—and taken the lives of Galindo sons—this was the man who retreated into Chihuahua and began the long haul to the border.

He was going where his great glory had begun, to gather new strength in arms and morale, then turn loose the full fury of his power on first Obregon and then on the hated old graybeard he had assisted with blood and sacrifice to become President.

I saw the dust of his outfit that day before I saw the seemingly endless procession of humanity moving snail-like across the rocks for a torturous climb through Blackhead Mountain Pass and onto the floor of the desert again. I rode up to within a mile of them and was using the binoculars when there came a loud series of yells from close by, and the pound of running horses. One of his outguard patrols was almost on top of me and I knew I was in for trouble.

The members of the patrol pulled up on panting horses, eight of the toughest-looking men I had ever seen. Hawk-faced and cold-eyed; men who had charged the rifles and machine-guns of the Yaquis. Dying and dispensing death was as common to them as eating tortillas and meat and beans.

"A damned hated American!" one of them said to the leader, a lean man of possibly forty. "From Agua Prieta, spying on us for Federal gold. Let's shoot him on the spot, the dirty *cabrón*, and take a much needed horse."

"I've never been in Agua Prieta," I answered quickly. "I'm from Colonia Oaxaca. Back there." I pointed.

They took my two guns and Mauser, and the leader jerked his big-hatted head. He said omniously, "We'll see about this. You ride."

There was nothing to do but obey, and that long scar across my stomach, put there by the slashing horn of a fighting black bull, began to tighten up as it always did when I was scared. For I knew that this time Villa would be more than unpredictable. He was beaten, whipped, and all but outlawed. He was in a savage frame of mind at the news that Obregon, instead of chasing him farther, and fighting, had established powerful garrisons in every town along the line of march. Instead of driving him into Agua Prieta the Obregon forces had come in ahead and were waiting. Cutting off supplies.

The long, winding column had pulled up for one of its frequent stops to rest the bony, half-starved teams. I saw patched harness and lymphatic scabs on backs denuded of hair from galls. Tired teamsters and wan-faced women and children. Barefoot men in rags, resting against wagon wheels.

I saw wounded, but none except those who could walk or ride. A starved, thirsty, once great army, but with plenty of guts left to fight.

An army of desperation.

XXI

VILLA was sitting his horse, with a group of his officers around him when we rode up. He was heavier than I had imagined from seeing his pictures; and he had a short neck like a black bull, this man who just eight years later was to be ambushed and that neck severed, the head never to be found again.

He was black-bearded and dirty from the long trip. His feet were encased in bull-snout tapaderos, his brown trousers, part of a suit, were torn, and the collar of his once-white shirt had been ripped away. We rode up and faced him, and the coldest pair of black eyes I ever encountered looked at us questioningly. I waited until my captor told him what had happened and in his bearded face and pitch-black eyes was all his hatred for Washington, for the Federals, for defeat itself.

I said, refuting the lie my captor told him, "That is not true, General Villa. I come from Colonia Oaxaca, where you were more than once in the early days of the revolution. This is my first trip to Agua Prieta."

"Why are you here now?" he barked

back at me almost like a pistol shot.

"To kill two men in the Federal army," I shot right back. "They sacked Santa Rosa last year and killed friends of mine."

"Who?"

"One named Maldito, the Little Bad One, whose Yaqui name is Red Feather —Pluma Colorado. The other is known as Apolinar Romero."

I told him why I meant to kill those two, holding nothing back. I told him of the burning of the hacienda and the details of the fight, and I told him about Carlos Martinez—and that I had shot him dead. Only then did the black-bearded face relax and those fury-filled black eyes lose a bit of their agate-hardness.

"I'm very glad you killed Major Martinez. I could afford to lose the men he took with him. I could not afford to lose the cannons. I could use them now."

He shifted his short, heavy figure in the saddle and reined the horse over with an off-side spur. He said, "Very well, señor. I'll let you go in, but you are to carry a message for me. You are to go to that damned gringo commanding the American troops"—and now his eyes flashed angrily—"and tell him that if his troops interfere in what is to come the cannons of General Francisco Villa will be turned on the city across the Line! I'll shell every business house in town!"

I didn't look back toward the long line of wagons. I didn't dare. Neither did I glance at the worn-out cannons. I said, "I shall be happy to carry the message, *mi General.* But not tonight. I do not wish to be shot by either Federal or American soldier sentries. I shall go in the morning."

He flicked up a hand in curt dismissal and I lost no time in getting out of there. I didn't know who was going to win that battle, but I did know there was going to be one hell of a fight while it lasted.

Once out of sight of that straggling army, however, I put the bay back into his best long-distance stride to cover the remainder of those seventy miles. I had lied to Villa. I wanted to get into Agua Prieta before dark, hunting two men in the darkness instead of engaging in battle to kill them unseen. And I wanted to see Mary Carlysle.

The bay made it, though I had to duck a couple of Federal patrols out to spy on Villa during the night. Just as the sun was going down I came out of the far reaches of the Bapiste Valley with a white handkerchief tied on the muzzle end of the Mauser. I heard a shout and four heads popped up from out of nowhere, four rifles were leveled over the holes in the ground, and I was beckoned in. The sentries wore Federal uniforms and looked like veterans, but I would have bet that not too many months before they had been as ragged like those forlorn ones back there with Villa. Now they were on the way to Mexico City with Obregon to drive out Huerta.

"Hey, mister, what do *you* want?" One of them grinned up at me. "This is no place for Americans."

"I have a message for General Sebastian Galindo."

"Bueno. Wait till I get my horse. I want a drink in the cantina anyhow."

"You bring back a big bottle, you *cabrón!"* bawled another as the lucky one, or perhaps unlucky one, slid into a nearby gully after his horse.

THE REST of it was easy. We trotted into dusty streets where soldiers patrolled and others lounged, and where people were going about their business as though nothing unusual was in the offing. There would have been no place else for them to go anyhow. I saw the trenches and the cannons, and the heavy artillery looked polished, if not new.

We rode past the plaza on Calle 7 and on to the Nacozari Railway depot where every siding right up to the Border which was so near that the American town across it seemed but a continuation of this Mexican one. Every siding was jammed with railway cars of every

description. I saw a big, heavy-jawed man come out of a small private railway freight car and lope away on a horse. General Plutarco Elias Calles, another who some day would become a President of Mexico.

My eyes, however, were riveted upon Don Sebastian and Torcuata standing beside another car.

They saw me and Torcuata's face lit up. A cry broke from her.

I thought, And I was looking forward to seeing Mary Carlysle!

I still was, but I was dismounted now and old Don Sebastian was patting me on the back in the Mexican greeting of friendship. He stepped back and Torcuata held out a slim hand, her face shining.

"Don Guillermo! And we thought for such a long time that you were dead!"

"And you?"

"Hidden away with Padre Leonardo and many other from the hacienda. Why do you come at this time?"

I said grimly, "Don Carlos Martinez is dead. I killed him in the big house in Santa Rosa. I came here because there are two more left to kill. Maldito and Apolinar."

Don Sebastian no longer wore the fiercely upswept mustachios of the Porfirio Diaz era. His gray beard was flowing and somewhat pointed. I recalled then that so was President Venustiano Carranza's.

Don Sebastian stroked at his and said in a quite matter-of-fact voice, "They are here, and are valuable leaders, Don Guillermo. You Americans must understand that the fortunes of war change the thinking of men. Yes, I know what you are going to say. They stole my ore and killed my bulls and shot my friends. The ore does not matter at the moment—"

"I found it," I interrupted.

"Thank you. I knew you would. But there is more ore, the bulls are dead, so are my friends, and now instead of killing bulls these Yaquis are killing enemies for us. A general must think of these things. There is no other way."

"In other words, you're a soldier now and nothing else matters. But I'm *not* a soldier and it does matter!"

"They are Federal soldiers," he said a bit icily.

Well, I thought, it's your ore and bulls. I went to my horse and swung up. I saw the question in Torcuata's eyes. She stood there, browner of skin now than she once had been, another black silk blouse of the kind she liked rising and falling. She was remembering a promise she had made, and now a question was in her amethyst eyes.

I said, "I have a message for the commander of the American troops. From Villa. He wants no interference from across the Line."

"Neither does Mary Carlysle over there!" Torcuata cried. "Now go! Go on across to your friends, *gringo!*"

I turned and loped past lounging soldiers and came to the Line. Troops from both countries paced endlessly, rifles over their shoulders. A tough-looking American brought his Springfield to "port arms" and blocked my way.

"No comes here *Mexicannes,*" he got out in the worst Spanish I ever heard.

"I'm no Mexican," I said shortly. "I have a message for your commanding officer. Who is he, and where is he?"

"Major Frederick Funston. Headquarters tent up there."

I gigged the bay into motion and crossed through. I was twenty-nine nears old, an American citizen, and for the first time since birth was setting foot on American soil!

I RODE over the same brown soil where my father had led the final twenty-one Mormon wagons to sanctuary, and all about me was a new flurry of excitement. All houses for the first five blocks back from the Border were being excavated, for the Federals had known Villa was coming just as Villa had known they were waiting. Up and down the Line the sentries on both

sides paced endlessly, and already people on the roofs of houses and taller business buildings were sweeping the desert with eager eyes for the first sight of a determined, desperate army coming in to attack.

Villa! Francisco Villa was coming! There was a certain magic in the very sound of his name.

I found Major Funston, a stockily built, middle-aged West Pointer, coming out of his command tent to a long-hooded staff touring car. I gave him Villa's message and he asked when I thought the rebels would attack.

"To an American officer and a neutral, sir, just as soon as he gets here. Though that's no secret to General Calles and General Galindo, Major. They know him."

"And your own opinion, Mr. Sandrigan?"

"The Federals are going to be whipped out of Agua Prieta, sir. Villa is thirsty, hungry, and he's desperate. And he was never more fighting mad in his life than he is right now."

"Thank you, Mr. Sandrigan. I'll drive over and have a talk with him."

Quite a crowd of Americans had begun to gather at a respectable distance from the soldiers on duty around the tent, and I rode over toward them. I suppose it was a curious sight for them to see a gun-belted "Mexican" riding across the Line. One of Villa's men with a message for Major Funstan, no doubt.

Well, I thought a little grimly, they hadn't missed it too far, at that.

A youth of about seventeen or so walked over and looked up at me, and grinned in faint embarrassment. His hair was yellow, too. He said, "You're my brother, William Sandrigan, aren't you? Jason told us what you looked like."

Obadiah. He'd been nine years old when I left; born the year we settled Oaxaca, as I had been born the year we settled Colonia Diaz and Juarez.

We shook hands and he said, quite solemnly, "If you wish to see Father and Mother, I'll take you to the house. It's right over there a few blocks."

He paced the horse at a fast walk and we came soon to a newly built white frame house on a corner. He took my horse around back to water and grain it and I walked toward the front porch to where a gray-haired woman in a long, old-fashioned, ground-length dress waited. She didn't speak a word and neither did I as I kissed her a couple of times on her rough cheek. Only then did she smile faintly and wipe at her eyes with a work-roughened hand.

"Your father," she said, "is inside. So is Mary Carlysle."

I clanked inside, feeling uncomfortable in the plainly furnished room, because it hadn't been built to receive men wearing big spurs and thorn-proof Coahuila leggins and cross-belted six-shooters. But the bearded patriarch of our family said nothing until we shook hands. Then he spoke.

"You've been gone a long time, William. We're glad to see you home with us again, my son."

Mary said, "Bill," in a gentle tone of voice, and extended her hand.

In a white summer dress much more modern than the one my mother wore she looked as lovely as ever. Clean and crisp and cool. And the hunger inside of me was a flame as it had been that time in Don Sebastian's patio, in my apartments upstairs, in the mouth of the tunnel her dead husband had dug in the side of a Mexican mountain.

We all went into the kitchen where the food I needed was still warm, and we talked of many things, all except what each of us wanted most to know. Obadiah sat and ogled my guns, though guns were not strange to a kid who had fled a revolution.

FINALLY it grew dark outside and the kitchen clock said nine, and I knew the time had come to go. I rose and picked up my sombrero.

I said to none of them in particular, "My horse is rested and fed, and it's time to get back across the Border."

"Why?" asked my father with a certain brusqueness in his voice.

I knew Mary was thinking, You're going back to Torcuata.

And my father was thinking, You're going back to kill again.

"It's necessary, Father," I said. "Certain matters pertaining to the hacienda and the mine to be discussed with General Sebastian Galindo, now that I am no longer his overseer."

"I see," he said, which might have meant anything.

By common consent my family did not follow Mary and me out to the front porch. We stood there in the darkness, hesitantly at first, before I bent and took her in my arms and kissed her. The fire went through us, a steady flame between two people who knew each other, though their minds were somewhat confused.

"You won't come back," she whispered.

"I wouldn't have to go far to reach Durango," I said. "Just from Oaxaca."

"Why," she gasped breathlessly, "how —Bill Sandrigan! How did you know?"

Obadiah came loping around the corner on my bay and I went out to him and mounted. Once away from the house I looked back. Just once. I knew, somehow, that I probably had seen it and my parents for the last time, and I think they thought that, too. I loped up to the line and the same tough-looking American sentry came to port arms with the Springfield.

"No Americans allowed across this Line!" he roared at me.

"I'm no American," I roared back at him. "I have a message for General Galindo."

I left him mumbling confused curses about the damned Border, the damned army, the damned revolution, and the damned fools who were stupid enough down there.

It was night now, and I had a job to do. I had to ferret out two men from hundreds and kill them, and then get back to Oaxaca.

XXII

A LIGHT shone through the open doorway of the box car I rode up to, and reined in. I swung to the ground as trains began to move slowly. The railroad gate to the Border was open, and rolling stock was being shunted over to the American side, out of line of shell fire from Villa's cannons. Washington had chosen Carranza over Villa and, although sadly beginning to regret the decision, was doing its part to help the man of whose assassination as he hid in the Indian village of Tlaxcalantongo, the peons one day would sing:

Now's the time, old beard tenango
You must get smart-monkey-chango
For off in Tlaxcalantongo,
They've cut out your gizzard-ongo

I mounted the steps of the box car as Torcuata came to the doorway, the only woman in either army not in a skirt. She still wore boots and gaucho trousers.

"I'd not expected to see you back so soon," she said, this woman who'd confessed she had loved me for nearly six years now. "Come in."

Two officers rose to their feet as I entered, and from his desk at one end of the car Don Sebastian lifted his pointed beard as he straightened with a sheaf of papers in one hand.

He said to the officers crisply, "He hasn't the mounts to make sufficient *Dorado* charges, and will be cut to pieces when he comes in on foot. A final check on the ammunition dumps back of the cannons. Make certain they're not exposed to shell fire. All troops will report to the ammunition cars during the night. That is all."

One of the men took a paper, saluted, and went out. Torcuata sat on one of the two bunks as though waiting. Don Sebastian looked at me. This was no wine-glass general with a mind wrapped up only in fighting bulls.

"Well, Don Guillermo?" he asked.

"I'm returning to my home in Colonia Oaxaca as soon as my horse rests for a few hours, General," I said. "I came to

report some things I wished you to know."

He nodded, and I sat down in a swivel chair. I told him the whole story from the beginning, filling in the gaps from what he already knew. I told of the new find of high grade and of Carlos Martinez, and how Don Carlos had died. I spoke of my last meeting with Tio and Tia Galindo, and he dismissed that with a snort.

"I should have kicked them out long ago," he grunted. "But have no concern for the future of Señora Martinez. I assure you I'll see that she is taken care of properly, and we'll see what can be done about rebuilding Tony Pizza's cantina for unfortunate Maria and her child."

I rose and put on my sombrero. I said, "Well, General, it's time to wish you and Señorita Torcuata good-by. You gave me everything when I had nothing, and I tried to repay in kind, sir."

"So you're going back among your own people?" Torcuata asked, rising to her feet, her amethyst eyes luminous.

"Yes," I said.

"Of course," she said. "But your horse must first be rested and that gives you time to go to the cantinas, where Apolinar and Maldito might be! Don Sebastian, you said we'd need every single man to hold this town against Villa. You'll have two less of your best if Don Guillermo leaves here."

"Arrest him!" snapped the old man to the remaining officer and in a flash a Mexican colonel had a gun on me and was taking mine.

I said coldly, "You bitch! I never wanted to get hold of a woman like I'd like to get hold of you now."

"The coin, *gringo!*" she jeered at me. "Remember? Remember the day you tore my breast to nakedness? The devil in hell is paying Don Carlos tonight for what he did two nights before my wedding."

"And now the devil's daughter is paying me back tonight also," I snarled at her.

"Silence!" roared Don Sebastian. He said to me coldly, "Any man on this earth but you, Don Guillermo, and he'd be against an adobe wall in five minutes." And to the colonel, "Call the guard and have him taken away."

FIVE tough-looking Mexican soldiers took me away with their rifles at hip ready, and another led the bay horse away to the remount corrals. I walked off down across the railroad tracks to where a big wire enclosure had been set up, appropriately enough, not far from the bawdy houses. It was one hundred and fifty feet across and filled with a roaring, drunken, brawling mob of soldiers. No lights and no sanitation facilities. I found a cleared place and sat down with my back to the fence; and while the guards walked an endless circle around us I thought of that American soldier over there who had mumbled curses about damned fools who would live on the Mexican border.

He had been more right than he realized. . . .

Eight hours later, at the crack of dawn, the cannons began to roar. Villa had attacked and the battle for Agua Prieta was on!

I was alone in the stockade now, with no water, and the two soldiers left to guard me only shrugged and maintained silence when I cursed them. Shells were exploding all over town and some of them were coming over and banging uncomfortably close.

Major Funston had laid down the law to Villa. If his shells landed on American soil the United States Army would help the Federal government's troops. But the cannons boomed on and I guessed that Villa had had more ammunition in those wagons than I had imagined. Machine-guns rattled and bullets, big lead slugs, some of them, whizzed all over the place. It grew hot and I cursed the guards whom I could not bribe because my saddlebags were gone with my bay horse.

Then shortly before noon Torcuata

came with a squad of four soldiers. "I'm taking you to our car, Don Guillermo," she said meekly.

I left the stockade in sullen silence, but drank from the canteen she gave me. I refused to speak. We went back toward where three hundred soldiers lay strung along a freight train, stolidly working the bolts of their Mausers, firing at something I could not see.

"General Calles and Don Sebastian ran in an armored string of cars to protect their headquarters," Torcuata explained. "Villa's first attack has been thrown back."

No answer.

We strode on, and when we came closer to the line of men sprawled on their bellies along the rails and shooting under the cars, black faces leaped out. One in particular. No red band around the cone of his palm-leaf hat now. He wore a sergeant's uniform. Maldito!

As we approached he rolled over on his side to get at his ammunition belt, then got to his feet, coming with a grin toward me and the woman who had tried to kill him that day in the patio at the hacienda. I thought, Irony! God, what irony comes with war!

He'd been my friend and her enemy, and had come to warn me to leave. And now—

"Well, so we meet again, Guillermo." He yelled down the line, "Hey, Apolinar!" and had to yell again because of the spanging of the rifles.

A bullet struck a box car wheel not far away and ricocheted downward. A man rose to his feet, his frame shuddering. A Yaqui. He walked twenty feet, fell, and seemingly from out of nowhere a Yaqui woman came running.

Apolinar came trotting up, but there was no grin on his big ugly face. On his features was the same expression there had been on the night when, with a bullet in one shoulder, he had spat fifteen feet at me and called me *"chingada, cabrón."*

He spat again and called me the same again. "We knew last night you were back. Some of the boys I have left saw you. We hunted the town over to shoot your belly out. Squads of us."

I turned to Torcuata and said roughly, "All right, you saved me from a bullet, and now we're square. I'm going."

"And, señorita," Maldito called, "you better guard him well. Because if he gets loose my boys will be hunting him, too."

WHEN I went up the steps into General Galindo's private car, for me that bloody November 2, 1915, came to a close at last.

The battle roared into its second day in Agua Prieta. People huddled in their homes simply because there was no place else to go, no water out there in the desert wastes. Villa's men had taken the east end of town now and were fighting savagely from house to house. Sun-bonneted *soldaderas* ran here and there through the streets.

Up at the east end of Douglas some of the American housewives had stubbornly refused to be excavated, and they were turned into angels of mercy. *Soldaderas*, so many of them girls of not more than fourteen and fifteen, trotted away to the fence. They leaned over the barbed wire boundary separating two countries, their young faces sweaty and dirty, holding out buckets. Begging for water for their men. Pleading pitieously.

Once they got it, they ran back into battle where their husbands crouched with hot rifles in their hands, and gave the water to men who gulped it and went on firing.

Villa's ammunition was running low now and there was practically no food and water except what the bonneted *soldaderas* could find for their men. But Pancho Villa damned near had the town on that second day, and most everybody knew it.

The railroad to Nacozari ran straight south through the Border, on the west side of town—the only route of retreat

open for Calles if the worst came. Time and again Villa had used the few troops he now had left with horses to ride to circle and cut the railroad.

If the Federals went out of Agua Prieta he wanted them to go out into the desert on foot.

All that time I had remained in Don Sebastian's car, protected by the steel cars separating us from the town, and with poker-faced guards outside. We'd scarcely seen Don Sebastian. He was in charge of his supply trains and staying with them day and night. In his private car I slept in one bunk and Torcuata in the other, an armed truce between us.

On the morning of the third day came the chance I had been looking for. Don Sebastian had wired El Paso and Juarez and, of course, Washington. He wanted a sealed train of fresh troops brought through under Immigration officers, and he got them. I looked out to see the long line of green cars coming along the tracks from Douglas, and I knew that Villa, with victory almost within his grasp, was doomed to failure. From inside the coaches U.S. Immigration men began to unlock sealed doors, and a stream of men in fresh green uniforms with clean rifles slung over their backs began to pour out. My guards broke to run, yelling in the general uproar, and I knew *my* time had come.

I jumped down the steps of the car and ran to the body of a Yaqui Indian, scrambling men in green all around me, and ahead a train that was backing across that Border in one hell of a hurry. I jerked a red-stained cartridge belt from around a dead man's waist and slung it around mine. The gun was a "Philippine" model .38-caliber, and a damned good one, though it hadn't been good enough to stop drug-crazed, machete-swinging Moros. Any other time I might have wondered how it got back from there, but right then it *was* back and I had it, and that was all that mattered.

I spun the cylinder and shoved the gun into a dead man's sheath, then Torcuata was beside me. I said, "Get back in the car, damn you!"

I broke to the nearest knot of soldiers, forced my way through, and went down the line at a trot. I thought of my Coahuila leggins and bolero jacket and big hat when I dived into the middle of a bunch of Yaquis, for they were dressed as they had been that day when they burned the hacienda.

In the confusion nobody paid me any mind. But one thing was certain—if Villa was driven out, I'd have to go with him. If Don Sebastian ever caught sight of me again he'd have my back against an adobe wall.

THE BATTLE had swung around to the south side of town now. Villa was out of shells for his worn-out cannons and if anyone could have taken a look at the silo of the big flour mill it would have shown why. It was shot all to pieces. But cannons were useless now and he was slugging it out with a savage, bulldog tenacity. It lasted all afternoon until darkness of that second bloody day.

I'd got away from the Yaquis, relieved that I hadn't seen Maldito or Apolinar or they me. Had I shot either or both I'd have wound up with slit feet. Had those tough fighters from behind Bacatete caught me they undoubtedly would have taken time out from the battle to hunt up some cactus.

That night I huddled in a gully southwest of town and watched while "burying parties" came carrying Federal dead, later to have banks pulled down over them.

The battle roared on into the third day, and this time it was the Federals who charged. In the middle of hell's own confusion of rifle fire and running men and dead bodies sprawled everywhere I cut down a side street and jumped over the body of a dead *soldadera*—and came face to face with Torcuata.

"I thought you were dead or gone!" she cried. "I've been hunting you."

"I told you to stay where you belong," I snarled at her. I hadn't had any water, or anything to eat since the afternoon before. "I've got to find them now!"

I had to. Once before, back at Oaxaca, I had remained and not tried to find them. It was too peaceful back there. It would be so again, and maybe I was crazy, but it had to be now because of the priest and the nuns, because of Tony Pizza, because of old Raul Martinez, because of old Juan Pablo. I told her that while we stood panting, and bullets made dust spurts from brown adobe walls and more men died.

"Very well," she said resignedly. "Down there where you hear the machine gun. I saw Maldito and Apolinar running to set it up at a corner."

XXIII

EASTWARD along an alley lined with thorny ocotilla fences I broke into a trot again as I weaved through rusty barbed wire like coarse cloth. The firing from that direction appeared to be dying down and I guessed that the rout of Villa's worn-out, hungry and thirsty men and women was beginning. I heard bugles and was certain of it. The chattering of the machine-gun stopped and in all that mad confusion I heard two men roaring with laughter.

I rounded the corner of the adobe house that no longer had a corner and saw them. As I went forward with the Philippine gun in one hand, they saw me. I wanted to tell them that I hadn't come because of Don Sebastian and Torcuata. I wanted time to gloat over Apolinar and tell him how I'd found his *gambusinos'* high grade. I wanted to tell them of an old man's hands being nailed to a saguaro. But there wasn't time. Maybe I wouldn't have taken it, anyhow. When the devil's own brand of hatred burned inside me with an unholy joy.

Maldito's black hand fell on the machine-gun handle with a hard, slapping motion of flesh against steel as Apolinar jerked his gun. I shot him in the belly and drove another slug that tore away Maldito's lower lip. He screamed an animal scream and his unbuttoned green blouse swung open. The sun flashed bright rays from a hidden golden chalice hanging from his belt, and as I shot him through the head the crazy thought flashed through my mind that my bearded father wouldn't have disapproved.

He fell and his hand tilted the weight of the water-cooled Maxim's ugly, flat snout. A stream of copper-jacketed bullets screamed off into the burnished sky while I pumped three more bullets into Apolinar Romero.

Not his shoulder this time. He didn't hunker back and spit dry spittle on my boot and call me a *"chingada, cabrón."* A man with four .38 slugs in his guts doesn't spit. He gurgles, with both hands clasped to his belly. On his back in the brown dust he writhes while he looks up at the sky for the last time.

I went over and picked up his cap and put it on. It helped a little, although the battle was finished except for some wild shots after the fleeing men and their *soldaderas*. I bent over Maldito and broke the string from his belt.

The gun had stopped firing. The Yaqui's head lay on his side with one hand still on the gun handle. His face was turned toward the far distant peaks of Bacatete, and his shot-away lower lip bared his teeth in a grin as though he were laughing hideously at the futility of it all.

I straightened, with the golden chalice in my hand, as Torcuata came panting around the corner of the house that no longer had a corner. She ran straight to me, gripped my arms, and buried her head against my bolero jacket.

"I—I thought I could see you go and not care any more, but—but—" she said chokingly, then got control of herself.

She straightened and wiped her eyes. I handed her the chalice Maldito had taken from the looted church in Santa

Rosa. She took it and said nothing, waiting for me to speak.

The rout of Villa's army had been complete and the firing now had died down to a trickle. General Calles, in charge of this Obregon army, had wanted only to win a battle. He had no desire to annihilate. His bugles were calling his men back into town.

I said to Torcuata, "Give that to your father to take it back where it belongs. I'm getting out of here fast with Villa's army—not going home to Oaxaca."

She looked up at me and I saw the faint mist in those luminous eyes. "Don Sebastian will not return to Santa Rosa, Don Guillermo. He—he will be buried where he fell with five of his supply soldiers at an intersection on Calle Seven. Five brothers, and now my father. All dead from Pancho Villa's guns. The last of the Galindo name in our branch of the family."

"We'd better be going then," I said. "I've got to find a horse. I'm leaving for Oaxaca at once."

I WAS absently pulling shells from the dead Yaqui's belt and reloading my pistol after punching out the empty hulls. We walked out into the main street street and not far from the plaza. People were emerging timidly from their homes to stare curiously at the sprawled bodies—some in new green uniforms, a couple of Villa's vaqueros in white cotton pants and shirts. Soldiers who had fought for three days were coming back with rifles slung, strolling almost casually. Torcuata and I crossed the small plaza and moved past the elevated little bandstand. From the bomb-shattered doorway of the deserted refreshment stand below a wheedling voice called to us.

"Please, señor and señora, a few centavos for an old woman. In the name of the Virgin Mary."

I didn't have any money, and it didn't make any difference. I wouldn't have given her a penny. She squatted there on her haunches, barefooted and ragged; fifty pounds lighter and twenty years older. Drawn of face and hungry. Serafina Mendoza, the "Mayor" of Santa Rosa who had sentenced five men to be shot.

And as she recognized us and began shrieking her pleas for mercy and forgiveness after us, I only wondered suddenly what Maldito and Apolinar Romero had been laughing so hard about those few seconds before they died. . . .

An hour or so later I was ready to leave Agua Prieta. I stood there at the intersection of Calle 7, or Seventh Street, where the body of Don Sebastian had been interred. Not in a grave. He lay exactly where he had fallen, with a square of railroad ties, five feet high and filled in with earth and rocks, to mark the end of a Mexican General. His sons had been buried at Juarez and burned with oil at Gomez Palacio. Torcuata wanted him here.

I put on my hat and turned away. Out there in the desert a long thin line of humanity was strung out for more than three miles, with the wounded staggering weakly behind. No cannons now and but three or four wagons. No water and food, and a twenty-mile walk to Naco, another Border town near Bisbee, Arizona, but where there would be no battle.

Pancho Villa's military back had been broken in the three-day fight at Agua Prieta, Sonora. His days of glory as a great leader was a thing of the past.

I turned away from the place where my *patron* had died as he would have wanted to die, and handed Torcuata the reins of her horse. She was going home with me to Colonia Oaxaca, to stay there for a while where the river ran quietly and the cottonwood trees were yellow-leafed and the house was gleaming white. That much I could do for her, a final deed for the *patron* who had pulled me up after a third-rate Spanish fighting bull had done his work too well.

We rode out of town leading a packhorse and headed out across the desert to where Niggerhead Mountain thrust

its volcanic peak high into the sky. We camped that night on the San Pedro River not far from John Slaughter's old San Bernardino ranch.

At three o'clock the following afternoon, Colonia Oaxaca came into view. I reined up at the head of the lane and pointed to where the house gleamed in the sun.

I said, "There it is, Torcuata. Carved out of a desert wilderness by my father and my brothers and the rest of us."

"It's beautiful, Don Guillermo," she said softly. "At this moment the most beautiful sight I ever have seen, I think."

I thought I understood, knowing what she had to go back to after she'd rested here for a few weeks. Her father and five brothers, the general and the five sons who were to have become generals —all gone. Burned and wrecked homes and no Galindo man to carry on the family name.

We rode on down the lane and pulled up in front of the house. My three brothers were there on the white painted porch, sober and silent as I swung down and helped Torcuata to dismount.

I SAID, "This is the Señorita Torcuata Sanchez y Galindo, men, the daughter of my *patron*, General Sebastian Galindo. General Galindo was killed yesterday in the fight in Agua Prieta, but the Federals whipped Villa out into the desert again. He's through as a big leader. He's sworn to go to Cannanea and wreck every piece of American mining machinery he can find, claiming it was an American major who whipped him. Or so the wounded said. It does not matter now. You can go back to Douglas and start bringing your families home."

They greeted her in Spanish and shook hands with her, and we went inside. I pumped water into the kitchen sink and filled a tin cup for Torcuata. My three stolid brothers stood around awkwardly.

I'd forgotten to explain her presence. I said to her, "If you'd care to clean up and change clothes Jason will show you where."

"I'll help you care for the horses," my oldest brother said. He added to Carl in Spanish for Torcuata's benefit, "Carlos, remove the pack from the horse and bring it inside and show Señorita Galindo to one of the bedrooms."

We walked over to the circular corral, leading the horses, and Jason now and then shot me a glance that was almost furtive. I thought, All right, you big solemn clod-hopper, go ahead and speculate. I don't know myself.

Presently we went back to the house and I went upstairs and knocked on a door. Torcuata opened it and smiled. She looked fresh and clean and so lovely it hurt.

"Come in, Don Guillermo," she said. "I'm glad you came up. I wanted to talk."

I went in and we sat down together on the bed, and I remembered another bed she had sat on just as I was climbing through a window. The eternal fires had roared through us moments later when in the miasma of my mind a voice kept repeating, She wanted you to do that. She's not the big-eyed youngster—

She had loved me since she'd been fifteen; flirting with me; fighting and taunting and jeering to cover the pain of loneliness. She had told me she loved me and, because of that love, had offered herself at a moment when death was riding the bloody streets of Santa Rosa.

"There is something I have to tell you, Don Guillermo," she began hesitantly. "I—no, don't look at me, please. Look over there. Much has happened since more than a year ago when the Yaquis came. More than either of us ever could have dreamed of. I had known only one kind of life, and even more than three years of revolution hadn't been able to change it until the day Maldito came with his Yaquis to wreck their vengeance upon Don Sebastian. I can still

remember how he looked there in the patio, offering you your life and demanding mine. I can still remember what happened when you tore my blouse and found out—when you kissed me for the first time.

"Then the revolution came and tore our lives apart and destroyed the only kind I had ever known. We left you for dead, running from the house as the shots were fired by Don Carlos. By the time the engine was ready to take Don Sebastian I knew that I couldn't go with him. I camped out that night with Juanito and two days later, after the Yaquis were gone, we went to the hacienda. I—"

"Juanito!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, Juanito. He kept me hidden out in the hills. It was only a few weeks ago that I joined Don Sebastian. So now I've seen another way of life so different from mine. Your big, solemn brothers who work so hard and have produced all this in the midst of death and destruction. You belong here with Mary Carlysle and I belong—I belong—"

I had her in my arms again, holding her close, with her lips to mine, knowing that I loved above everything else in the world this woman of the fiery spirit and the passionate honesty. The flame between Mary Carlysle and myself had been only the flame of hunger and loneliness, and somehow I'd have to tell her. I kissed Torcuata again.

I had to push her away from me. My hands weren't trembling now. I said, "No, I don't belong here, *querida*. I belong at hacienda de Galindo. We're going there tomorrow."

WE WENT downstairs. In the kitchen Jason was alone, eating a cheese and bread sandwich before going back to work. As we entered he brushed at his beard and looked at me out of his solemn eyes.

"It's no use, Jason," I told him in Spanish and slid an arm around Torcuata's slim waist. "I've broken all the laws of our family. I don't belong here any more. We're going back tomorrow, and you'll have to tell Mary for me when you go after your family. She'll understand."

He cleared his throat and wiped at his beard again, and came to his feet. "I was in Douglas with my family the night you visited Father and Mother," he said. "I—ahem—came back by wagon during the battle, for once feeling quite secure that all the rebels were busy and I was in no danger. I think I knew beforehand what your decision would be, but it would appear that Mary knew even better."

He had been speaking in English and Torcuata looked up at me. *"Que dice?"* she asked eagerly. (What does he say?)

I took the letter Jason handed me and opened it. It was Mary to the core. It read:

> Don Guillermo—and that name now fits more than ever—you were right when you said that a man can never go back. Neither can a woman, as you so shrewdly guessed there on the porch in town. You belong where you've been for the past five years, and I'm going back to the office in Durango. God speed you both, and name your first girl Maria.
>
> Mary

I translated the letter to Torcuata. . . .

We went back to the burned-out shell that had been Hacienda de Galindo. We rode in late one afternoon, past three miles of newly plowed fields, and came at last with growing wonderment to what was left of the great place. A calele hawk with crested head flashed by, and from the tops of the palms came the familiar squawk of the parrots. Padre Leonardo came padding out of the church and his face lit up as he came toward us. He shook hands with me and the clasp of his fingers was strong.

"We kept her out in the hills with us for a long time, Don Guillermo, but I somehow always had the feeling that there would come a day when you'd be bringing her home again. Where is *el patron?"*

I felt Torcuata's hand on my arm. She looked up at me and then into the face of the robed churchman. She said

simply, "Here, Padre. Don Sebastian will not return. This is the new *patron* of Hacienda de Sandrigan."

Sound floated down to us from up at the bull pens. I heard a familiar roar of a man's voice—one I hadn't heard since the night Juanito Camacho had wheeled Chico away from the coach and joined in the fight. Iron-shod hoofs rang out on the hard-packed road laid out by Torcuata's grandfather more than sixty years before, and Chico came running like the wind, his mane flying.

"Don Guillermo!" bellowed Juanito Camacho, and slid the Morgan to a halt.

From all over the place they were coming—men, women, and children. The peons who tilled the fields and the vaqueros and the bull handlers. Many of the others, like Don Sebastian, would never come back.

"Let me tell you something," Juanito bellowed above the babel of voices in excited greetings. "You ought to see old Paco Negro—"

"Never mind," I laughed at him. "Torcuata told me how you got him and most of the cows and—"

"You should see the new crop of bull calves! Best fighting stock in all Mexico three or four years from now. Some new Morgan colts, also."

I didn't ask about José at this time. Padre Leonardo later gave me the details.

But José was another of the missing ones who would never be back!

Torcuata and I walked alone under the basalt arches and through a wide gap in the thick wall where huge doors had been. Hall of the Bull Heads. It was roofless now and the bull heads were gone. But some day in the future there would be a new roof, and in a few years the bull heads would be back, while the big stamp mills in Santa Rosa pounded away at Apolinar Romero's once hidden *planchas de plata.*

Right now that didn't matter. What did matter was that Torcuata and I had been away a long, long time and now we were home again.

FEATURED NEXT ISSUE!

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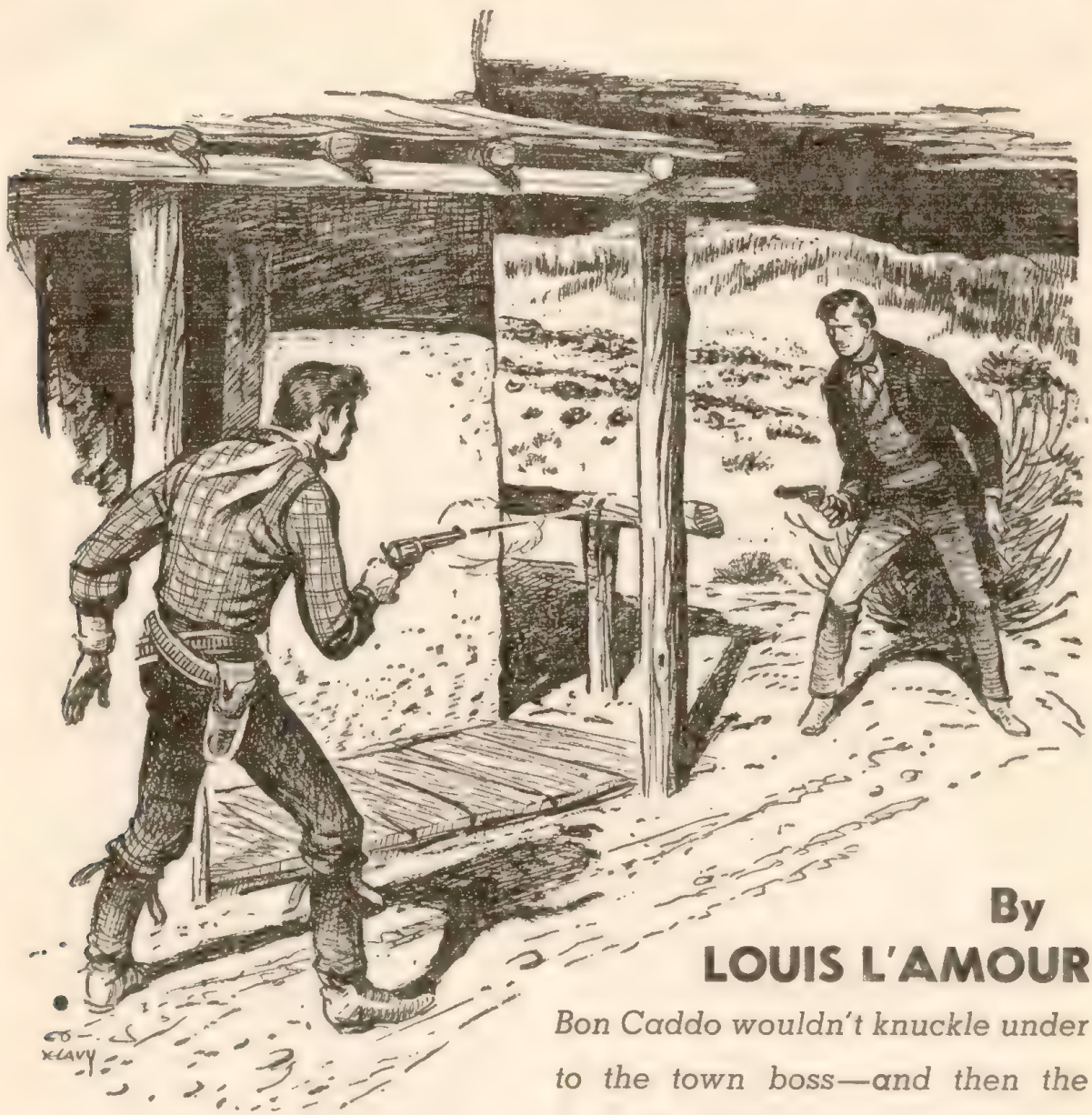

By
LOUIS L'AMOUR

Bon Caddo wouldn't knuckle under to the town boss—and then the boss' lady came into the picture!

HATTAN CASTLE, a six hundred foot pinnacle of rock that points an arresting finger at the sky, looks down on a solitary frame building with a sagging roof, a ruined adobe, and several grass covered foundations—all that is left today of the once lively town of Shoshone. On a low mound a quarter of a mile away are three marked graves and seventy-two unmarked.

East of the ruined adobe lies a long and wide stone foundation. Around it there is a litter of broken bottles, colored and stained by the sun, and twenty feet

behind it, lying among the debris of a pack rat's nest, is a whitened skull. In the exact center of that skull are two round holes less than a half inch apart.

Several years ago the bones of the skeleton were scattered about, too, but time, rain, and coyotes have removed them, and now only the skull remains.

Among the scattered foundations one finds occasional charred boards, some charcoal, and the blackened evidences of an ancient fire. Of the booming, brawling town of Shoshone, nothing more remains.

In 1874, a prospector known as Shorty Becker drank a stolen bottle of whisky on the spot. Drunk, he staggered over the edge of a wash, and grabbing for a handhold, pulled loose a clump of manzanita, rolled to the bottom of the wash and slept off his drunk there. In the morning, climbing out of the wash, he found a gold vein where the manzanita had been, and the town of Shoshone was born.

Shorty Becker opened up one of the richest claims in the state's history, and nineteen more claims proved to be fairly stinking with gold. Shoshone went from nothing to four thousand people in seven days, and three thousand of the four came to steal, to chisel, to cheat and to kill each other or the working miners.

Spawned in the explosive world of sin, lust and crime, Shoshone lived in anarchy before the coming of John Daniel. Then he arrived, and the town had found a master. With him were two men, the hulking Bernie Lee, and the vicious little killer, Russ Chito.

Marshal Dave Allen went out in a blaze of gunfire when John Daniel and he had words. Daniel faced him, but fired only one shot. The killing was done by the deadly Chito and the brute Bernie Lee who were hidden on opposite sides of the street and took the marshal in a deadly crossfire.

Shorty Becker was found dead two days later with a gun in his hand and a bullet in his brain. John Daniel, as coroner, called it suicide. Becker was found to be carrying a will naming Daniel as his only friend and heir.

Daniel turned the working of the mine over to others, and opened the Palace Saloon and Gambling Hall. He imported women from the Barbary Coast, and a couple of bartenders skilled in the proper application of deadly Mickeys.

FOUR years passed, and the town boomed. It throbbed with lust and sin and murder. Men came for the gold, remained to spend and drink and die. The few who were wise and saved their gold and tried to leave were always found dead along the trails or in the mountains. Buzzards marked their going, and soon terror the streets of the small town. John Daniel—aloof, cold, and supercilious—ruled Shoshone with a rod of iron.

Chito and Lee were his right-hand men, but fifty others were ready at his beck and call. Immaculately dressed, coldly handsome, deadly as a rattler in the blind, John Daniel surveyed his domain, his authority unquestioned by any man who remained alive more than a few hours. Of the seventy-five graves in boot hill, it was said that he or one of his two major henchmen were responsible for more than twenty. That number is conservative, and the number who died on the trail was never known. Then Bon Caddo came to town.

He was Welsh by ancestry, but what more he was or had been no one ever knew. He arrived on a Sunday, a huge man with broad shoulders and big hands. His jaw was wide and hard as iron, his eyes were a chill gray and calm, his head was topped with a wiry mass of rusted hair. The claim he staked four miles from Shoshone was gold from the grass roots down.

Within two hours after the strike, Russ Chito dropped into the Palace. John Daniel stood at the end of the long bar with a glass of sherry.

"Boss," Chito said, his evil face gleaming with acquisitive lust, "new feller in town struck it rich up Lonetree."

"How rich?" Daniel was interested but cool.

"They say she'll run twenty thousand to the ton." Chito touched his lips with a dry tongue. "The richest ever!"

Twenty thousand to the ton!

John Daniel felt his pulse jump and his thin nostrils widen. Why, the discovery mine wouldn't go more than a tenth of that!

"Invite him in. Tell him I want to see him."

"I did. He told me where I could go." Chito's face was ugly. "I'd like to kill the dirty son!"

"Wait. I'll talk to him."

Bon Caddo did not come to Shoshone. Nor did his gold leave the country. Every freighter, every stage, every wagon and rider was checked with care. Nothing left, and Bon Caddo worked steadily and hard, minding his own affairs, uninterested in the fleshpots of Shoshone and cold to the offers and blandishments of John Daniel.

At the beginning of the third week, John Daniel called Cherry Creslin to his office. She came at once, slim, beautifully curved and seductive in her strictly professional way.

"You like to ride," Daniel said. "Put on that gray habit and ride my black. How you do it is your own affair, but get acquainted with Bon Caddo. Make him like you."

She protested. "Oh, John! Let one of the other girls do it. I'm sick of your drunken, dirty miners!"

Daniel's eyes were cold and level. "You'll do as I say, Cherry, and you'll do it now. Anyway, this man is neither drunken nor dirty. He's big and tough—and he has no use for liquor or gambling."

She got up. "All right, I'll go. But you'll wish you'd never sent me. I'm sick of these jobs, John! Let's cash in our chips and pull out. Let's go to New York, or Boston, or even back to Frisco."

"Get started. I'll tell you when to go, and where."

The canyon of the Lonetree was warm in the spring sunshine. The cottonwoods whispered secrets to each other over the stream that chuckled humorously to the stones. There was no sound but the trilling of birds, and on the bank above the stream, the methodical strokes of Bon Caddo's pick.

He wore a six-gun belted to his thigh, and another was stuck in his waistband. A Winchester .44 stood against a rock near by, while just out of sight in the mouth of the tunnel, where for the time being he had stopped work, was a shotgun. It was a revolving shotgun, an effective and dangerous weapon.

Standing with his feet wide apart in their heavy miner's boots, he made a colossal figure. He was fresh shaved that morning, and for once his shock of rusty hair was combed. His red flannel shirt was wide at the neck, and his huge forearms, bulging with raw power, showed below the rolled-up sleeves.

At the sound of hoofs splashing in the water, he raised his head. Then he saw that the rider was a woman and smiled.

Long before he made his strike he had heard of John Daniel, and he knew his every trick. Moreover, he knew this woman by name, knew she was Daniel's own woman. He could see, as she drew near, that she was genuinely beautiful and despite the hard lines that showed beneath the lovely skin, there was a touch of warmth in her eyes, but it was a restrained warmth.

SHE drew up and looked at him. "Good morning, Bon Caddo." Her voice was low and lovely. Deep within Caddo something stirred, and he tried to bring up a defense against it. She was all woman this one, whatever else she was.

"Hello, Cherry."

"You know me?" She was surprised. "I don't remember you."

"You never saw me, and I never saw you before, but I've been expecting you. Will you get down and stay a while? The sun is warm."

"You—you've been expecting me?" She was upset. She was accustomed to

handling men easily, to controlling situations. This man was different. He was not merely a physical giant, but he was intelligent, and somehow—she acknowledged it to herself—exciting.

"Of course. He has tried everything else, hasn't he? Everything but you—and murder."

Her face stiffened and her eyes went hard, but she did not pretend to misunderstand him. "So you think he sent me? You think I'm the kind of woman a man can send on some—some dirty business?"

He leaned on his shovel. "Yes," he said, and she struck him across the face with her quirt.

He did not move, although the red line of it lay vividly across his cheek and lips. "Yes," he repeated, "but you shouldn't be. You've got a heart in you, and courage. You've just been riding with the tide."

She did not relent. "You're very clever, aren't you?"

"No. But this situation isn't very difficult to understand. Nor are you, Cherry Creslin. It's a pity," he said, "that you're tied up with such a murdering lot. You've a lot of woman in you, and you'd make some man a woman worth keeping."

She stared at him. The situation was out of hand. It would be difficult now to get him back in the right vein. Or was this the right one?

"You may be right," she said quietly. "Maybe I've been waiting for you."

He laughed cheerfully and stuck his shovel down hard into the pile of muck, then walked over to her horse. The black nuzzled his arm. "Not that way, Cherry," he said quietly. "I'm not so easy, you know. Actually, there's only one way. Be honest."

She measured him, searching herself. "Honest? I don't know whether I could be—it's been so long."

"Ah, now you are being honest! I like that. In fact, Cherry," he leaned his big shoulder against her horse, "I like you."

"Like me?" Some strange emotion was rising within her and she tried to fight it down. "And you know what I am?"

"What are you? A woman. Perhaps no worse and no better than any other. One can't always measure by what a person is or has been. Anyway, it's the future that counts."

"You believe that? But what of a woman's past?"

Bon Caddo shrugged. "If a woman loved me, I'd start counting the days of her life from the time she told me she loved me. I would judge by what happened after that—not before. Although," he looked up at her, "I'd be a hard judge for the after years."

She shook her head. "How did we start talking like this? I didn't come for this."

"Of course not. You came to make me fall in love with you or to lure me down to that hell-spawning sinkhole at Shoshone. Well, you might manage the first, but not the last."

"If you were in love with me, and I asked you, would you come?"

"Certainly not. Doing all a woman asks isn't proof of love, and the idea that it is, is absurd. If a man isn't his own man, he isn't worthy of love. No, I'd use my own judgment, and my judgment tells me to stay away from Shoshone."

His eyes darkened suddenly, and he looked up at her again. "We of Welsh or Irish blood, Cherry, have a power of prophecy or intuition or something in us. Maybe it's the gift of the Little People, but we've got it. Now I'm thinking that if ever I go to Shoshone it will mean blazing hell and death—for me or the town or the both of us."

Something cold and frightening seemed to touch her. "Then—then don't come, Bon Caddo. Don't come at all. Stay here, or better still, take your gold and go."

"You advise me that way? What would John Daniel say to that?"

"He wouldn't like it," she replied simply. "Not a bit. But it's my best advice to you."

"No. I shall stay until my claim is worked out. I'll not be driven off."

"May I come back again?" Cherry Creslin looked down at him.

"Of course, but you come soon."

Caddo watched her go, then returned to his work. There would be trouble, he knew. He doubted that Cherry would tell John Daniel of her failure. Not yet, at least. She would come back—and perhaps again. Then if she continued to fail, John Daniel would try something else.

THREE times she came in the days that followed, and each time they talked longer. Inevitably the day came when she returned to Shoshone to find John Daniel awaiting her. When their eyes met she knew she was in for trouble.

"Well?" His question was a challenge. "When is he coming to Shoshone?"

"He's not." She knew at once there was no use in evading the issue. She had probably been spied upon. "He's not coming, and I'm leaving. We're to be married."

"You're *what?*" He laughed, but it was not a pleasant sound. "Don't be a fool! Do you think you can trick me that way? Marry him and get all his money for yourself?"

"That's not the reason. You'd not understand, John, but I love him. He's a real man and a fine man and—and—don't try to stop me."

"Try?" John Daniel's eyes were ugly with fury. "I won't *try!* I'll *do* it! Hereafter you stay in town. I'll find other means of taking care of him."

"Sorry." She got to her feet. "I'm going back to him."

He struck her across the mouth, and she fell to the floor, a trickle of blood running slowly from her smashed lip. She looked up at him and said, "You shouldn't have done that. I'm sorry for you, John, or I would be if there was a decent bone in your body."

Furious, he walked from the room and back to the Palace. The first person he saw was Chito. "All right." He was cold and calm again now. "You wanted to kill Caddo. Go do it."

Without a word, Russ Chito turned and faded from the room. Watching from her window, Cherry saw him go and instantly divined his purpose. Terror filled her. She ran to the door, wrenched it open, and stopped. Bernie Lee stod there, grinning at her.

"You ain't goin' no place," he said. "Get back inside."

She stepped back. Suddenly, she was cold and trembling inside, filled with terror—and alone. There was no chance to warn Bon Caddo, and the little killer would give him no warning. Chito would be almost half way there now. He would ride furtively, keeping under cover and always drawing nearer, nearer. . . .

In the Palace, John Daniel stared down the road long after Russ Chito was out of sight. The boom was over here, anyway. He would sell out and go away. Within the past few months the population had fallen to less than half what it had been. Few were left on which to prey, for those remaining were the gamblers, the scum, the thieves. It was time to move. But with the gold from Caddo's claim he could be finished with this sort of thing. He would go to San Francisco, open a place there, and he would take Cherry with him. He would keep her, force her to work.

During the months in which she had been with him he had never won her love, and it galled him to think that Bon Caddo had. John Daniel was an ugly man inside, and hating was a natural thing to him. He hated anything that resisted him, anything he did not or could not possess.

The afternoon wore on, warm and still. There was no sign of Chito. In her cabin, Cherry paced the floor. In the Palace Saloon, John Daniel bit off another cheroot and swore softly. Long shadows began to crawl out from the base of Hattan Castle and from the false fronted buildings. John Daniel straightened his black string tie and muttered.

He walked to the street and looked down the trail. No sign of Chito. Nothing.

Darkness came, and he went to his office. The saloon business began, but it began in a desultory fashion, for the whole town seemed to be waiting as indeed it was. Seven o'clock passed. . eight. John Daniel walked irritably into the saloon and looked around. Men avoided his eyes, for they could see the cold fury that possessed him. Nine came and went. Then, suddenly, there was a terrific crash of glass, and men sprang to their feet, staring.

Where the alley window had been was a gaping hole, and sprawled on the floor inside, lay Russ Chito. He had taken a shotgun charge through the chest.

Men rushed to him. Only John Daniel stood erect, white-faced with anger. In all his rule at Shoshone his power had never been questioned, never threatened, and Russ Chito had been his strong right hand. Then the swinging doors smashed inward, and Bernie Lee's huge bulk tottered into the room and collapsed on the floor.

Someone turned him over. He was alive, but his face was beaten out of all resemblance to anything human. John Daniel rushed to the door and plunged through the night, his coattails flapping, a gun in hand. Cherry's cabin light was lit, the door swung easily in the light breeze, but the cabin was empty!

RUSHING back to the saloon, Daniel stumbled and fell. He came to his feet swearing. Bursting through the door, he yelled. "Pete! Dave! Ed! Get your horses and get after that fool! He's got Cherry!"

Men were rushing for the door when from outside a voice shouted the word most dreaded in this dry desert land where there is little water, even for drinking.

"FIRE!"

Everyone in the saloon rushed crowded toward the door, and the street was already black with rushing, shouting men. At the far end of town a deserted shack was ablaze, and the wind was sweeping the flames toward the next in line.

As the crowd surged toward it, John Daniel turned, and saw flames licking the roof of another building on the north of town, and then one on the west.

His cheroot in ragged shreds, he turned and walked swiftly across the floor to his office. Rage filled him, but it was a futile, bitter rage. He had been beaten, but at least, he knew when he was whipped. He still had the money, carefully changed during the months from gold into bills. There was more gold buried under the foundations, but that could wait. He could always come back for that. Now, while the others fought fire, he would go.

Ripping open his desk drawer he took a key from a secret place, then squatted before the safe and opened the door. He took out the bills, kept always stuffed in neat packets in a pair of saddlebags. He rose and whirled toward the door.

In midstride, he caught himself. Bon Caddo stood in the door. His red hair was rumpled, his hat gone, his two big hands on his hips. And this night he wore two guns.

"Going some place, Daniel?" His voice was low.

John Daniel stood stock still. For the first time he knew fear, for he knew that he was looking into the face of death. He took a step back, and then another, but Bon Caddo was walking toward him.

"All your life, Daniel, you've lived by force. You're murdered and ruined and you've lived by murder and ruin. Out there your town is burning, and I've burned it, Daniel. Now you're going with it."

Grabbing a bottle from the bar, John Daniel hurled it—a narrow miss. Then Caddo lunged for him!

Viciously, like the cornered rat that he was, John Daniel struck out, but Caddo took the blow in his face and didn't even wince. Then Caddo struck Daniel, a thundering blow on the side of the head that split his ear while the shock of it

made his knees buckle and his eyes glaze. Before he could straighten, another huge fist slammed him in the stomach.

Caddo shoved him back against the wall and began to slap him. Only slaps, but slaps that carried the power of a grizzly's paws, so that the gambler's head rocked on his shoulders. Eyes blazing with cold fire, Caddo stared at him. "Like hitting women, John? How does it feel to be hit? Like killing, John? How is it going to feel to die?"

In a wild burst of panic-born strength, John Daniel, all his fine polish smeared and broken by fear, jabbed out wildly, and Caddo fell back. Tripped by a fallen chair, he staggered and fell. John Daniel dove for the back door—and made it. With Caddo's boots pounding after, he rushed out into the night lighted by the blazing fire, and turning, plunged toward the back of the neighboring adobe where he kept a horse.

The horse was gone!

Trapped, he whirled and he stared back. Forty feet away Bon Caddo faced him and the night between them was red with the leaping flames of the crackling fire.

John Daniel remembered his gun. He grabbed for it, raised it, the fierce ugly lust for killing filling him, choking him! He brought the gun level. In front of Bon Caddo a red eye winked—once—twice, a jesting, laughing red eye. It winked again. Thunder roared in John Daniel's ears, and a terrible flame rushed through him. He did not see the fourth wink of that red eye, for he was dead before it winked, falling backward into the broken branches and limbs of a manzanita. . . .

THERE is a place in the Tonto Basin where a long, low ranch-house looks upon a valley. Cottonwood leaves whisper their secrets around the house, and on the wide veranda a gray-haired woman watches her husband walking up from the barn with his two tall sons. Inside their daughter sings a song more haunting than the old songs her mother sang in the Palace Saloon. The big man whose hair is no longer rust red, stops by her side. He looks over the peace of the meadows, listens to the singing and the whispering leaves, and to the splashing of water as the tall sons wash their hands before the evening meal.

"It's been a good life, Mother, a good life," he says quietly.

Far to the north there is an adobe wall with a bullet in it, a bullet that nobody ever saw. A smashed elbow bone, covered now by the sand of a wash, lies among the debris of a pack rat's nest, and where once a manzanita grew, there is a whitened skull. In the exact center of that skull are two round holes, less than a half inch apart.

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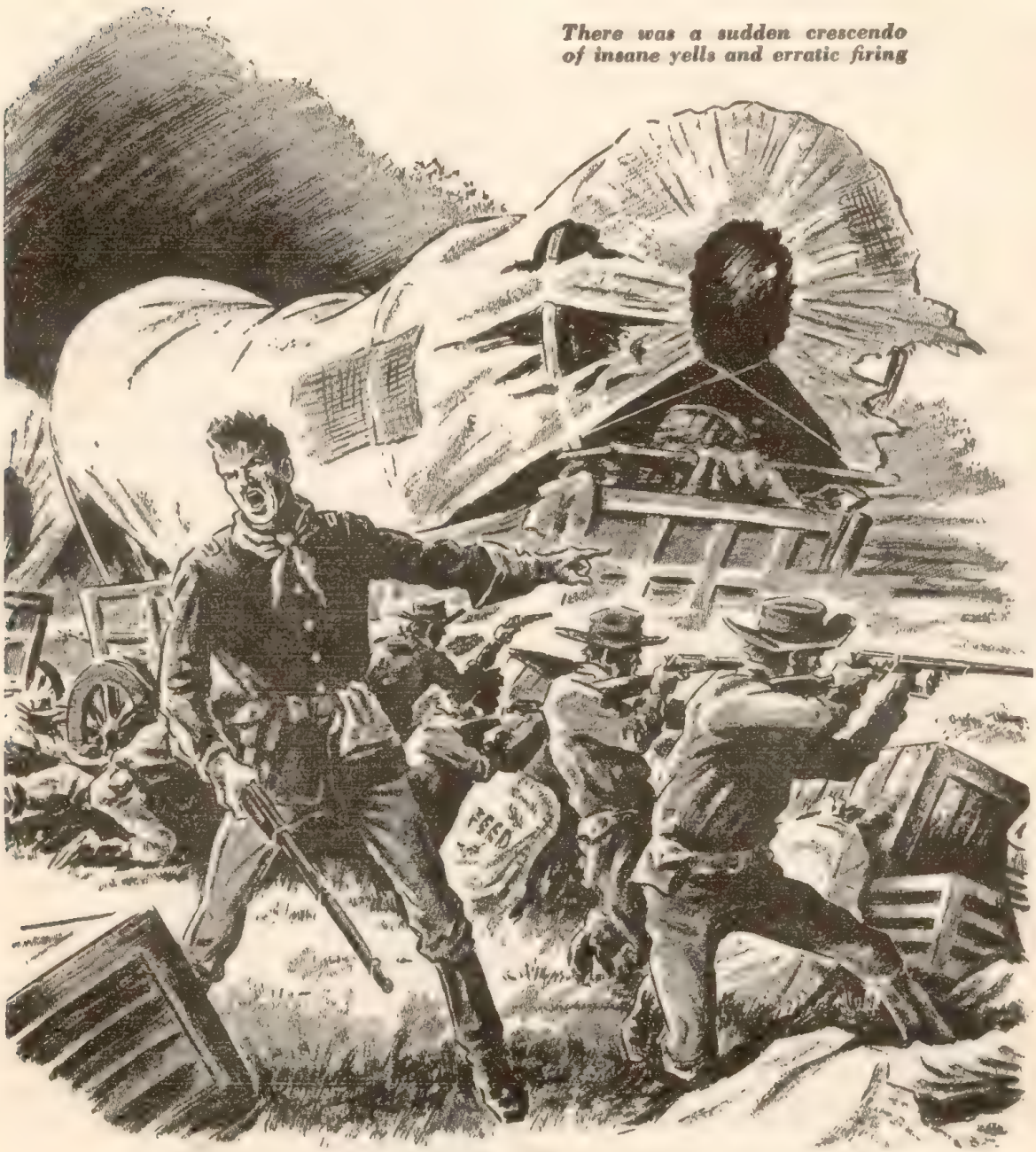


There was a sudden crescendo of insane yells and erratic firing

TRAIN

A Novelet by GEORGE C. APPELL

I

IT WAS the artillery of thumping wheels that prevented Cashman Rodney from hearing what clay-faced Captain Hollising had to say, and Cash spraddled onto the jouncing wagon bed and braced himself on hands, knees and boot tips and heard the *crang!* of a carbine bite off Hollising's next attempt. An Apache howl came from the back distances—banshee-loud above the thrashing of the whip—and from somewhere along the racing train of eight wagons men yelled back and forth across the last of afternoon.

"We're braking, sir," Cash told the man at his knees. "Try again."

The rear wagon was beginning to yaw to the grip of brakes. Cash faced behind him once and saw his horse fighting the snaffle that held the bridle to the chain gate. Beyond that there was nothing but swirling yellow dust that smoked away in thick ruffles to show dark figures flash across the wake of the wagons. An immense man with chevrons was putting his troop horse into the dust, waving one arm backward and forward.

Buffalo soldiers, thought Cashman Rodney. He faced down to the captain's taut, gray features and braced his muscles once more as the wagon shuddered to a lurching, skidding stop. "Try again, sir."

The waxen claw of Hollising's right hand crabbed away from his stained

belt buckle and up his alkali-chalked shirt to his throat. He was trying to shake his head.

"Lissen—Cash." Hollising got it out between tight yellow teeth.

The drivers were reporting in fore to aft, and the numbers came down the standing train like the spatter of buckshot. Nervousness released to relief does that. "One present 'ccounted fer. Two present 'ccounted—"

Colonel Rust was lash-cracking his flanks into perimeter position. The big sergeant, Mearns, appeared from the settling dust shrouds and spurred forward to where Rust must be.

"Go ahead, Captain," Cash said.

Hollising had not long to live now and in the next few seconds he must say what he wanted to say and relax into death. "Put that thing—'way."

It surprised Cashman Rodney that his hand gun was hot in his palm. He flipped it, caught it, and holstered it. It was empty.

ALTHOUGH it was cool here under the speed-cleansed canvas hood, Hollising was perspiring all over. Sweat was wilting his faded neckerchief and soaking his chalky shirt black. "The Tenth Cavalry's a damn—fine—bunch."

"Yes, sir."

"Stick with—it." Hollising had to get his breath for the last of it. "Rusty likes you—ver' much." One glazing eye snapped in a wink. "Stick with her—too." A great shucking gasp scraped from his mouth and his heart fluttered to a stop. His skin seemed to soften as the grayness ebbed from his face.

Cash Rodney tried to think of something to do but there was nothing to do, because Colonel Rust was carrying his dead with him to make the Apaches think there were no dead. So Cash patted Hollising's sticky hands once, revolved on pinching boots, propelled himself from the gate into his saddle, and threw loose the snaffle and found stirrups.

Alkali scud was sifting in a huge circle around the wagons where Rust had his perimeter out. Sergeant Mearns was nowhere in sight. Men were dropping from boxes and slapping their thighs clean, and Cash stood straight in his stirrups, searching the wagons for Rusty. She'd been riding in No. 3 wagon with the sutler's wife, an hour before.

"Mr. Rodney!" Colonel Rust dragged his boots around the steaming axles of No. 1 and led his winded horse toward the rear wagon. Rust was powdered to the armpits with prairie chalk, his hat was gone, and his damp hair was stuck to his forehead. A tall man, Rust, with a white thatch on top but with a mustache that remained russet. It lay quietly along his upper lip, then leaped upward to the flatness of his cheeks.

Cash swallowed sand. "Here, sir." He jumped off his horse and presented himself.

"Where's Captain Hollising?" Rust was breathing hard. His nose was red, and his voice brittle with fatigue. They had come a long way from Fort Sill, and there wasn't much time left to get to Phantom Forks.

"Dead, sir." Rodney told him how. "Took two bullets through his—"

"I don't want to hear it." They'd soldiered together since Shiloh, those two. "His body?"

"In the last wagon, sir. I managed to drag him off his horse when he was hit."

Rust, nodding in acceptance, raised a lean forefinger to his nose, trapped his nostrils, and squeezed. "You're second-in-command of the detail now." He released his nose, grabbed his hat off his pommel, and put it on. "We had one man cut out and captured—same as dead—and one hit. Badly. Mearns has him." Rust pulled his horse to him and swung up. "Get the Horse Book from Hollising's gear and tell Mearns to run the Duty Roster. Stables where we stand. We move out in one hour." He said that wearily. He had said it so often, since leaving Sill.

Then Rust found it in him to smile. He asked, "Know where we are?"

"Approximately, sir."

The colonel told him, "Quarter march from the Moccasin, two marches from Phantom Forks." Of a sudden he resembled a tired lynx. "They hit us much more, Mr. Rodney, we ain't going to get there. I'm about out of devices, mister, so start thinking of some." He tapped flank, circled on the forehand and went to the trot, and made dust the length of the train.

Why don't they hit us again? The question b r o u g h t Cashman Rodney around fast, but there was nothing out there but the perimeter riders silhouetting themselves against the empty lavender distances. And it came to Cash that this was attrition demonstrated at its best—attrition by the finest light horsemen in the world. Only the Apache thinks in terms of ratio of numbers; and this band had picked up the train two days out of Sill and had clung to it with the mannered precision of mountain panthers stalking for the kill.

THREE days out of Sill they'd realized what they were stalking—the advance party of the 10th Cavalry, thrusting alone toward the Forks to make the place habitable for the remainder of the command when it changed its station. Eight equipment wagons and half-a-hundred buffalo soldiers, and three white officers and some civilians. Two females, it was observed.

On the fourth day the Apaches had struck with the speed of thrown knives, had snuffed out three black men in faded blue, and knocked two others out of their saddles. On the sixth day they had cut out the remount remuda and killed a two-stripes-on-sleeve man, tagged another through the back and left him sagging off a bucking horse.

And today they'd hurled themselves up from a shallow arroyo and played with the train for almost ten miles, by the white man's count. One man had been cut out and killed, two others hit. One a white officer. The Apaches squatted in the canyon shadows of dying afternoon, smacking lips and waiting.

Cash Rodney lifted a leg over his saddle and let his horse plod toward the No. 3 wagon. He could see her on the box, binding a shawl around her hair—binding it around and around and around. Her slender arms made rhythmic motions as she worked.

Cash felt sorry for her. He hoped she had a gun and could use it, for women captured by Apaches do not wish to live to tell of it. He felt sorry for himself, for an instant, for he doubted they would reach the Forks and he doubted—as did Colonel Rust—that a man could get back to Sill for help. Even if one did, the help would be too late.

Cashman Rodney had concluded, during the past week, that he was too young and too valuable to die. The commission in his round-topped trunk had but recently been signed by Rutherford Birchard Hayes and Cash had been looking ahead through the opaqueness of the coming years to the time when he would mount it, framed, next to his retirement orders.

"How's the ranking second lieutenant of the detail?" Rusty—her name was Lydia, but nobody ever called her that—had pins in her mouth, and had to speak through compressed lips.

"Dried out . . . Afternoon, Mrs. Mackenzie." You had to mind your manners with a sutler's wife.

Mr. Mackenzie himself popped his turkey neck out through the fore eye of the hood and blinked hard at Cash. "Godamighty, sir! Will they not let us be?"

Mrs. Mackenzie raised swollen eyes from a heavy Bible in her lap and spoke quietly and quickly to her husband. He vanished under the hood.

Rusty said, "Father just came by, looking like he did the time I pulled up all his vegetables down at Cobb that time."

She was wearing out-sized elkskin leggings, although from the beltings up she was all female in a close-fitting spun

blouse. She looped the last of the shawl around her captured red hair and smiled down at Cash.

"He was thinking of devices, Rusty." Cash glanced out to where Sergeant Mearns was closing a pharmacy chest and directing Corporal Struber and Lance-Corporal Washington to fetch the struck man to a wagon. Cash glanced back to Rusty and up to her eyes and said, "The captain went out."

Her fingers froze on the last pin. Her mouth went down, and a tiny line formed between her brows.

"He went out good, Rusty." Cash picked up his reins and faced away. "Numb all over, he was."

Her fingers moved again. She finished the pinning, dropped her hands, and shook her head several times as she released a long breath. She had been in the Army for all of her twenty years and she had seen this before. She had come to understand that it is something you must accept, not combat.

"Thanks, Cash." Her smile was a lip-jerk and then it was gone. "I was just thinking—"

"About—Hollising?"

SHE laced her fingers neatly together and regarded them for a moment. "About knights."

"Nights?" He had to cough.

"Plumes and—armor." She flung her hands apart. "Nothing. Just that if we had that some of us would be alive now and"—she felt the folds of her elkskins for a kerchief—"and—but we haven't." She sniffled once and laughed a little and kept her face toward Mrs. Mackenzie. "There. We can't have, so we haven't."

Colonel Rust cantered past the struck man and Cash thought of the Horse Book. He touched his hat, spurred after Mearns, and reached him at No. 2 wagon where the four bodies lay stiffening in straw. The wounded rode in No. 1.

"Mearns, the captain's in No. Eight, and you can transfer him to Two now. I take Stables in ten minutes. We move out in forty-five. Break out rations and ammunition and water the animals. Personnel waters at Moccasin."

Mearns accepted the information gravely. Then a white smile sickled across his dark good features and he whacked his carbine boot and chuckled once. "My Sweet Lips here, which I call this gun, he snagged two of those folks."

"Nice shooting. Look, Sergeant—someone's up for two stripes, vice Corporal Smith Duty-to-Death yesterday. Remind 'em of that."

II

CASHMAN RODNEY put himself out to the slowly circling perimeter and rode easily around it, conscious of the wide-eyed riders, yet not noticing any particular face or name or insignia. He was probing the back closets of his mind for a way out of this thing. He couldn't find it, and the gradual realization of that was monstrously irritating to him.

Rust's ideas had run out and time was running out, and sometime soon—tonight, maybe, or tomorrow or perhaps the next day—the attrition would gather strength and then would come that final scuffle of gun stocks on naked flesh and steel on bone and the lunging eagerness of lances and the horrified defiance of torn women and—

Cash shook it from him.

Rust had zigzagged, he had saved his dead and gathered his wounded; he had built pit-fires at night and eased the train away from the savages. He had rigged false wagon hoods from tarpaulin and boughs and rolled away from that, and he had divided his train and brought it together again in order to split and confuse the pursuing band. But always did it close down on them again like relentless copper shears that sliced into their flanks and snipped off their rear and left them weaker each time. And there was no remuda now, no remounts or team horses.

A trumpet blatted Stable Call. Sounded it brassily, arrogantly. Cash swung

back into the train as the echoes filtered across the greening twilight and died in the lonely sand hills of the horizon.

He had found nothing in his mind except the memory of dying Hollising's words. Stick with it—stick with her.

Knights, she'd said. Something from a schoolgirl's dreams. Knights and armor—and there went your mobility and surprise, the two prime factors governing the use of cavalry.

Cash smiled sadly to himself. He conjured up the image of a column in armor, and the image was ludicrous—snail-paced and noisy, helpless on foot, gasping under the weight of warm metal.

He pulled his horse down and sat motionless in the dusk, listening to the restless sibilance of voices ranking off the formation. He saw Rust at the head of the train, tall and silent and stiff. He felt sorry for Rust, for the colonel was riding out the remainder of his destiny and the finish would not be pleasant to see nor easy to remember—an old man on his back in the dust choking his blood out through splintered teeth while the hideous visage of a frustrated desert tiger rose above him with lance thrust back for the final plunge.

Cash shuddered, shoved his shoulder-blades straight, rode up to Mearns and told him. "We bivouac on the Moccasin. Move out on my signal."

"Yes—sir!" And, "Lance-Corporal Washington's Acting Corporal now."

"A good enough name for the job. Sergeant, you ever seen Phantom Forks?"

Mearns nodded briskly, dark in the thickening darkness. "Jus' a stockade, Mist' Rodney, on the Canadian River."

"Well, it's the most valuable stockade in the world right now." Cash squinted ahead for Rust's arm signal. "If we don't reach it, I'll make you sergeant-major in hell."

At the walk they swung heavily through the night, dull spur rowels clinking like lead dollars. Rust was his own point three hundred yards ahead and Cash was trailing at the rear, stepping carefully across the plum-blue shadows. There were no flankers because an announced approach does not require them at night. Drying axles were complaining in short creaks that bleated fitfully and could be heard for a long distance.

They were metallic bleats that went spang-sharp into the moon darkness and rattled through crooked arroyos and struck into willing ears.

Cash, trudging at Acting Corporal Washington's right, turned away from the rising crystal disc in the east and took in the man's shiny purple face and the regular, dance-easy swing and thrust of his dusty thighs. Cash said, "They won't hit at night."

"No, sir." The corporal's voice was drum-deep and resonant. "I hear from res-vation Apach' that it's because at night they can't see us buffaloes." He tried not to laugh and it sounded like a series of short sneezes.

"It's because they're scared of getting killed in the dark," Cash said. "They won't have any eyes in the Hunting Ground."

"That it, sir?"

WASHINGTON didn't believe it, and Cash didn't care. He could smell the man's body-nitrogen and he could hear the man's eating tobacco.

The column was swinging away from the low-slung Dipper now, pointing left of it. A nervousness rippled down the teams and through the troop horses and that would mean water. The Moccasin.

"Mount!" The word was a throat-rasp passed from Rust back. The colonel wouldn't risk ambush at the creek. Apaches change their beliefs just like anyone else.

Unaccountably Cash needed to talk to Rusty. There wasn't much time for anything now and he had to hear her voice and find out if everything was as right as it could be. He turned the file-close over to Washington and went up

to No. 3 at a trot. He wasn't surprised to find her at the ribbons, swaying easily left and easily right to the lurch of the wagon. A raucous snoring came from under the hood.

"You better take up slack, Rusty. They smell water."

She faced down to him and faced up to the teams again. "They won't pass Number Two, Cash."

"No—no, I guess not." The bodies were stale in their straw and the sweet-rancid stench of them was baffling No. 3 team and keeping nostrils quivering and forefeet unsure.

"Rusty?" She didn't answer; she didn't have to. Cash gave her the rest of it. "You got a gun? One you can use?"

She took up slack slightly and brought the lead bridles down a bit. "I've been in the Army a long time, Cashman." She called him that when she was impatient. "Longer than you." Then gently she told him, "It's a forty-four."

"Oh." Cashman Rodney felt guilty, somehow. He had the feeling that he had intruded into some secret recess of her being. Gruffly, to shield his guilt, he said, "Don't sound so sad about it. A gun like that's insurance."

"I'm not sad. Just all worn out and fretted up and—like when Mama died. I couldn't understand that, and I can't understand this. I want to do something crazy."

Cash dropped reins and gave his horse its own pace at the near team's rumps. He started to remove his gauntlets and didn't. He wanted to reach up a naked hand and take one of hers but he knew she wouldn't receive the gesture.

"Can't understand what, Rusty?" Her shawled head was small against the globe of the moon and he thought, My Lord, I could put that in my pocket!

Rusty's voice was low in her throat but Cash could hear it all. "When Mama died, at Fort Cobb, I went out and pulled all the vegetables up. I don't know why; it was silly. Maybe it was because Father had put them down and Mama said they'd never grow in sand. I agreed with Mama, so when she went, I ruined the garden."

The train was slowing to a shuffle, the pole-trees almost pushing the teams. They were closing up on Colonel Rust, slender and dark in the silver wash of the moon.

Rusty said, "And now it's like that again. They think I'm in the way."

"Your father never—"

"No, he's never thought I was in the way. But these men do. Mearns does." She raised an elkskin legging, kicked down the brake, and held No. 3 to a stop. "He told Corporal Struber I was a Jonah and the train was hexed." Straight at Cash, voice vibrant. "But if you dare mention that to anyone I'll make you wish you'd joined the Navy and been drowned!"

The word was passed for him and he gathered rein, grinned up at her and waved once. "All right—we have us a secret."

Colonel Rust stabbed a hand directly west. "There's the water." It was a pewter trace snaking through gray slope bottoms. "From here it's two full marches north to the Canadian. We'll bivouac now and move out at three o'clock."

"What about them, sir?" Cash hooked a thumb over his shoulder. "They'll be behind us, not ahead. If we might slip a man—Struber, say, or Washington—up to the Forks for help?"

RUST inhaled swiftly and exhaled slowly and there was faint derision in it. "If any men are at the stockade they'll be panners or trappers lying to each other about why they didn't sluice-out twenty dollars an hour from the mud. No, Mr. Rodney, the detail is shaky enough as it is." The colonel had his nose in his finger again, and when he spoke the words were nasal. "I estimate this Apache band to be about eighty men, and that's a lot. You will note, mister, that they won't risk an

all-out attack until we're cut down to proper eating size. You will further note that unless a miracle happens we'll be down to size before ever we raise the Canadian."

"Yes, sir. I've noted that." Cashman Rodney kept his eyes on the scurrying creek water ahead. Rust was lowering his hand and regarding his officer with stiff resentment at what had sounded to the colonel like sarcasm. Cash said, "If we could knock those hardwood ammunition boxes apart and secure the slats around the men's upper bodies—

From Ranching to PIRACY

THE first buccaneers of the Spanish Main were originally in the cattle business. A group of rough customers on the islands of the Caribbean lived by rounding up and butchering wild cattle. They cured the meat in smokehouses known as boucans and sold it to passing ships. From boucan came the term buccaneer. The cattlemen took to plundering ships that were wrecked among the islands, and after a while it occurred to them that piracy might be more profitable than raising beef. They thereupon went out in ships to prey upon the treasure-laden Spanish galleons. Thus the early buccaneers were just ranchers that took up another line of business.

—*Sam Brant*

like chain-mail, sort of—why, then we might—"

"Mr. Rodney, keep your hat on in the sun. Mr. Rodney—post the first relief!"

And, posting it, Cash heard the fluting double notes of whippoorwills from the distances of the night. He had not seen a whippoorwill for eight days.

Rust took them north away from Moccasin at a walk and thirty minutes later put them to a clip-trot. And as the first pink blood of dawn stained the desert he jack-knifed east into it, threw out flankers and pulled in his point, and passed the word to Cash to close up the files. It was a tight column now, moving steadily in the noise of axles and wheel rims and bed planking; in the off-key music of bit chains and bridles and rowels and drying leather and brass.

It was a man-silent column, for no one could speak when the awareness of threat was rising from the yellow heat shimmers like some evil thing unseen but felt. Eyes red-lidded from fatigue rolled whitely the horizon around, searching for the flicker of a headband or the flash of sun on metal.

Toward noon Rust called Cash up and gave him a choice. "The band has our remuda—twenty head—and that gives it close to a hundred horses. So do you think they'll be content to herd 'em back to their hills? Or use 'em to alternate ride in attacks on us?"

Rust swung up an arm and shot it down, and the train dutifully followed him on the other tangent, west. He was veering again, trekking in looping curves. It was flat country and the band couldn't observe the train from hills or flat mesas; it must stick to the trail. Rust was buying time with space.

Cash answered, "Alternate ride to attack us, sir."

"That's what I believe, too. But I wanted your thoughts on the matter." Rust spoke hesitantly as he rode and indecision was softening his mouth. "There's a good chance you'll command this detail, Mr. Rodney. Don't abuse it. Don't smoke up any crazy thoughts for it—like rigging the men in wood slats. That concept of defense was blown out by gunpowder."

Cash knew file-raw resentment then. It sawed up through him and flushed his face under its tan. It was resentment at himself for having suggested the thing incompletely to Rust; and it was resentment at Rust for having misunderstood it.

"I was thinking ahead, Colonel, not back. There must be some way to protect mobility besides flannel shirts and

four hoofs." His argument floundered.

Rust leaned over and spoke in a hurry. "You sound, mister, as if you've been reading one of my daughter's cast-off school books rather than Upton's Tactics which, as I recall, is the standard written authority on cavalry. Mr. Rodney, take your post at the drag."

A day and a half, Cashman Rodney reckoned. This afternoon was before them and all of tomorrow, and perhaps they'd arrive at the Canadian and perhaps they would not. Perhaps, too, they could send a man ahead the last quartermarch to alert the panners at Phantom Forks. No, Rust wouldn't allow that; Rust lived by the book, so perhaps they would all die together, very reg.

Rust had an omen, let him ride with it.

Cash revenged himself in thought. I'm beginning to dislike you intensely, Colonel. You're a great deal like your daughter, except that she has manners. And I am beginning to love her intensely, Colonel, especially because she pulls up vegetables that don't grow, although you wouldn't comprehend that because it's not in Upton's.

Mr. Rodney, mind-reading is not a luxury for lieutenants, it is reserved for older men who have set up standards by which to live and who can peer back the length of an eight-wagon train and read in the lieutenant's face what he is thinking. Your responsibility is the rear. Study it carefully.

Cash was startlingly conscious of Rust's mustache, limp now from heat, twisted over his neckerchief knot. Cash faced full around in the saddle and studied the way they had come since noon.

III

THE long, hoof-dappled curve of their last loop, Cash saw in his studying look, disappeared with the ragged wagon tracks over a slope of sand that eased away to lower land and spread away to infinity. Nothing there.

Cash fronted and yanked his hat lower against the hammering of the sun. He glanced once at Acting Corporal Washington on his left. Then Washington's glistening eyes were on Cash and a strange expression crossed them. It seemed to Cash that the man was offering a silent plea. He, like Rust, rode with an omen, and it amused Cash Rodney to realize that each man's omen had to do with Rusty.

She was up there on No. 3 still, flipping the ribbons and sitting small and straight and proud while the sutler snored and Mrs. Mackenzie intoned from her Bible. Cash could visualize Rusty's pert face held high as she drove, her grass-green eyes defying whatever lay ahead to come and challenge. It was the heritage of blood, that defiance; Rusty's kind had never flinched, ever, unless it had been under the slash of a Saxon whip centuries back in time.

Acting Corporal Washington was tapping his mouth organ against one wrist, preparatory to sounding a chord, when a whippoorwill called from the near distance behind them and a shot slapped smartly. Sergeant Mearns jerked up from his saddle, slumped over the pommel, and grabbed fitfully at his flopping reins.

It all happened at once and Cash heard his voice go soprano with urgency as he yelled the train into a lumbering circle, for bone-deep in him was the quiet knowledge that this column could not run again. It must stand now and deliver and receive and kill and get killed and draw blood and bleed, for that is the ultimate mission of soldiering, though it isn't in any of the manuals.

No. 1 came racking around on flying wheels and seesawed up behind No. 8. The stutter of brakes was louder than gunfire and it smothered Rust's heavy bawling.

They spun in from two directions — the copper shears — and closed down from left rear and right rear and scattered sand from the rise of the slope that had shielded them and hurled them-

selves at the tiny wagon circle with throats breaking open and naked bodies hard down on the off-sides of their ponies' pumping necks.

Cash saw Washington toss the mouth organ away, stab spurs, hurdle the lowered chain gate of No. 8 and bruise the soft noses of No. 1's team as he passed. He saw Rust supporting Mearns at the gallop and he saw Rust wrench the sergeant into the circle, and he saw the flanks collapsing inward as they sought the temporary fort of canvas and wood. The soft thunder of unshod hoofs was descending on Cash Rodney and he sank his hooks and vised hard with his thighs, and felt himself carried gracefully over No. 8's gate and into the smoke-laced air of the circle.

He was off then, staggering on march-weakened legs, and tugging at his hand gun as he went.

"Godamighty!" Mr. Mackenzie dived clumsily off No. 3 and landed on his chest and chin. He rolled over twice before Washington lifted him up and shook him. The Acting Corporal was laughing.

"Horseholders one-in-four!" Rust's voice roughened to the command. It wasn't necessary, but it was from the book and that's the way he was playing it. As dealt, Cash thought bitterly.

Rusty was packing Mrs. Mackenzie through the fore eye of No. 3, and Rusty had her .44 in her free fist. She saw him and waved it. Cash bunched fingers to his mouth, fanned them out and swung swivel-hipped to the rear axle of No. 1. He flattened on his belly, braced his service revolver on a spoke, and got two off in quick succession.

That's when the shears came together to form a battering ram.

It plunged at the south arc of the circle and exploded against it in a thunderclap of thrashing hocks and wailing lungs and the stammering rip of unaimed musketry. An Indian in a red breechclout and a white headband was snapped clear of his crushed pony and tossed onto the grimy canvas of half-careened No. 1. Utter surprise was on his swart face.

PURPLE pits chewed across his features and punched through his torso, then he flipped backward and was gone. There was another volley—one steady crash—from where Washington stood. Then the writhing battering ram broke loose and fell apart and whirled away on flashing hoofs and formed a great, running noose far out from the train.

Smoke dipped low and streamed from the circle in tattered gray shreds. Two troop horses were down, convulsing to the final impulsions of life. No. 1's team was gagging its way to death in whickers of bowel-torn agony. Washington dodged that way, squeezed off four shots, and let the animals slump to peace.

Calmly the Acting Corporal reloaded, assisted the hit horses of the troop from pain, and waited for orders.

"Nicely, nicely, nicely." Cash was up to his knees, off his knees, on his feet at the crouch. "You'll be picked up on the morning report as full corporal."

Corporal Struber dashed past lugging the pharmacy chest and Rust snatched it from him and knelt to Mearns. The big sergeant was motionless in the sand. Cash heard the colonel growl at Struber. "Plug him up—he's still alive. Hit in the back, right shoulder-blade . . . Mackenzie!"

The sutler was down on hands and knees, bug-eyed and panting.

"Mackenzie, bust out that ammunition from No. Eight and issue same! Mr. Rodney!" Rust was a wild man, with wild gestures and wild bellowings.

Cash leaped past No. 3 without trying to look inside. "We've got maybe three minutes, sir."

"When I want your thoughts I'll ask for them." Rust planed an arm around the wagon circle. "Personal gear, ration cases and water casks. Line 'em up under the beds and for God's sake get the teams off the poles!"

But Struber and Washington were

working at that already and within two minutes a core of horse-flesh had taken shape in the center of the circle. The dismounted troopers were prone behind boxes and casks, jaws tight and carbines steady. Cash squatted by Sergeant Mearns and whispered questions to him.

"What outfit? What name? Where are you?"

Mearns opened his eyes and forced his wind-split lips apart. "I got the answers."

Cash gripped him, lifted him, and carried him to No. 1 and rolled him inside as he would a heavy carpet.

Rust shouted.

The running of soft hoofs filled the near distance and bore into them with the inevitability of sin. It tightened into a whirling, circling rush that gave no single target and closed down in a sudden cresendo of insane yells and erratic firing. Bullets slocked into wagon hoops and cracked against stakes, and there was the musical *cling!* of a punctured bucket.

"At will!" Rust was on stage, hand gun bucking as he fired into the wings. His hat snapped off and skidded into the dust and he made a helpless motion with one hand.

Carbine fire ripped around the circle like grommets being torn from sailcloth. The wagons went frosty with smoke. Struber released a maniacal cry and sprang onto a dangling cross-tree, gripped the raised pole and began to pull shots off the hip. They broke smartly, evenly. They came like the rhythmic cracking of slate.

And Cash knew quick admiration for that man and silently thanked God for the 10th Buffalo. Then he was up beside Struber, plugging shots slowly into the widening attack. He could count seven naked forms thrashing on the sand, then he went deaf to a controlled crash of carbines.

The fluting, accentless yell of bone-shattered pain quavered from the smoking heat and the pony rider fell back, fell away. Their intervals thinned and lengthened, then there were no intervals at all, only irregular spaces.

The man Washington was on one knee, aiming. He pecked at the convulsing torsos out there and stilled them with level shots. It was shooting that had matured back on the range at Sill, but had been born generations before in some green and purple fastness of the Sudan.

THE ULTIMATE mission of soldiering. Cash Rodney dropped down and took a quick tally. He barked for Struber and told him that two more bodies must be lifted into the straw of No. 2 wagon.

The smoke streamed lazily away and mingled with the settling dust, and the silence that is the silence of shock took hold of them.

Rust was talking through his teeth and Cash had to lean low over him. The colonel had one knee between locked fingers. "Fill in that Number One team from the other wagons—somehow." Rust opened his jaws and tongued his mouth and closed his jaws and tried to grin. "Under the knee-cap, I think. Took me through the tibia. That the word, mister?" This time he did grin. "You seem to know everything."

"I'll help you up, sir. There's plenty of room in—"

"Number One?" The syllables smacked like canister and Cash jerked straight. "Not while I'm in command! Here!" He hooked an elbow up to Cash. "Get me on my good leg."

Cash limped him to his horse and helped him up. Rust frowned down at his officer, one leg hanging free of its stirrup.

"Mr. Rodney," said Rust, "there's only one more day left in this detail. After that—" The colonel narrowed his tired eyes.

Cash looked that way and saw the faint shroud of moving alkali shimmering south off the slope. "Eating size?"

Rust winced. "You know a few things, anyway. — Stables, mister!

Stables and ammunition. And load up that gear from under the beds and pass the word to stand by with the teams. We won't move immediately." He dipped his hat brim southward. "That's what they'd like." He choked of a sudden, his voice broke, and he clutched his knee.

Cashman Rodney helped Rusty from No. 3 and held onto her hand for just a moment. She didn't tug it away. She had the .44. She balanced it on her palm and cocked her shawled head and, presently, nodded. "Still loaded, Cash. Full around."

Cash let her hand drop. "How was it? All right?"

Her bright green eyes rose to his. She said, "We're still together, Cash."

He had a lot of things to tell her then and he needed to say them with all his might but none of them would take shape on his tongue. He tried to speak and he couldn't. He saw Mr. Mackenzie scamper past with a splintered ammunition chest and he called out for an ammunition report.

Colonel Rust rode toward them, froze his glance on his daughter, and swung his horse around to conceal his hit leg. "I'm still able to function, Rusty girl. You stay with Mrs. Mackenzie. Mr. Rodney? We'll leave all dead animals where they fell. Dead Apaches will be divested of their headbands as a token of our contempt. We move out near twilight"—he visibly gathered strength—"on my command."

The stars were campfires smuttering low in the sky and the moon was yet a pale promise below the eastern hills when Cashman Rodney heard Acting Corporal Washington's husky voice.

"Lieuten'nt, suh? Fo'ward you're wanted."

It was Rust.

Rust's arms were tallow and he was trying to support himself on them. His hit leg was wrenched up onto his saddle skirt in order to relieve the deadening pain of a hanging wound. Clear above the sounds of turning wheels and tumping hoofs and whimpering equipment was the colonel's breathing. It was an out-gasping that came regularly and insistently, like a child blowing on a candle.

Rust admitted the thing out loud. "I'm passing command to you." For a dozen hoof falls he contained himself. "The fever's got me, I see things I know ain't out here and never were. An' I hear voices, mister, so I'm no good." He slumped further down and his body creaked as he shoved himself up again. "Cap'n F[illegible]sing's, for one."

"Yes, sir. Will the colonel take to Number One now?"

Rust sniggered wetly as delirium burned into his brain and fried his capillaries before receding. "John loved her, but he didn't understand her. Did you, John?"

CASHMAN peeled back and found Corporal Struber in the star-dark-

Tell-Tale Evidence

There was a young lady of Bray,
Dressed up as a ranch hand one day—
She could rope and shoot,
Just like any galoot,
But her ridin' form gave her away!

—Pecos Pete

ness. Together they guided Rust down to No. 1, got him under the canvas, and lay him out in the straw.

"Corporal, get Mr. Mackenzie up here and tell him to stay here. The pharmacy chest's inside and he can use it."

And then it was all on Cash Rodney, and it hit him as if the heavens had settled across his shoulders. He had to fight off fear of it. He put his horse out front and kept his neck on a turn-buckle in search of shadows moving against shadows or the frightening dart of low silhouettes in the sallow shine of the coming moon.

A quiet elation was taking hold of him, and he recognized the cause of it and felt shame. John Hollising had loved her but she hadn't loved him. John Hollising was dead, though, and what difference did it make now? She hadn't loved him—hadn't loved him.

IV

PUTTING the thought from him, Cash Rodney forced the elation it had brought back into the cellars of his consciousness, and compelled himself to consider the present. Now! It was a word they had drilled into him for four years. Now! What happens now? Who commands now? There in no past and there is no future; no Shiloh or Sharpsburg or First Manassas or Lake Erie or Niagara or Yorktown or Saratoga or Camden. No Canadian River or Phantom Forks or tight stockade or—distantly—retirement orders being framed next to a mildewing commission signed by Rutherford Birchard Hayes. Only Now!

Cash could see them in the moonlight, poking after him with perhaps some trust in his meager abilities, and riding with the sure heritage of fighting men in their veins while their eyes stayed strained open and their fingers tickled trigger guards. He could see Myers and Neal and Lincoln and Jones and Vernon and Brown and all those others who would never march again and those who some day might. Mearns, for one. Mearns braving agony to say, I got the answers.

Rusty, little Rusty, snub-nosed and sitting arrogant-tense on the box of No. 3 with the ribbons firm in her palms and the .44 heavy and bruiseful at her slender hip. The colonel, twitching fitfully on the smelly straw of the ambulance wagon, lost in hallucinations that wavered up from the past, but had no part of the present.

Cashman Rodney decided on a forced march.

It wasn't in the books for such a situation because it might fray the command down to slobbering impotency by dawn. But neither had chain mail and metal breast plates been in the books until someone had thought of them and applied them.

Rust would have kept the men to their prescribed pace—walk ten minutes to relieve saddle sores and stretch cramped legs; trot five minutes to prevent the chill of night from charleying animals' muscles; walk mounted for fifteen minutes to ease the breathing of men and horses; halt five minutes in each half-hour to inspect hoofs and see to cinchings and bits. And Rust would have been right most of the time.

But he would have been wrong now, and the knowledge of that struck Cashman Rodney clean to the conscience and cleansed his mind of any doubts. Marching at the prescribed pace would take them a third of the remaining miles to the Canadian, even allowing for veering. Forced marching might arrive them at the river by mid-morning; and if they could reach it and sneak a man ahead to the stockade—.

Cash swung sharp about. "Corporal Struber!" His voice was harsh with decision and the will to cement it in his mind. "Close up the wagon intervals and pull in the drag. We march at my pace from now on."

Cash lengthened his loops, eliminating jack-knifing and thrusting north in long, shallow curves. Thrusting

through the purple and silver shadows with the frightsome awareness of glittering eyes coveting every movement, following each wheel rut. Cash listened hard for the call of a whippoorwill.

"Struber!" There's no Jonah with this train unles it's the Jonah of fear, and fear can come like a sudden disease and leave us all slack in the saddle with no will to fight, only the wish to die. "Corporal, rig your wheel measurers and give me the tally since noon. If we're hit again we'll circle and stand. And you might as well know that there are fourteen rounds per man left, no more. Figure out the rest for yourself. And Struber—get the Duty Roster and the Morning Report from Mearns in Number One and take over as acting first sergeant. At Reveille, Washington makes corporal. Move out."

Mobility and surprise. The two words haunted Cash like gray beasts prowling around the outer meadows of his mind. Haunted him and taunted him and winked evilly and left him slightly unsure of himself. And that is the way fear gets you. Slowly, by infiltration. A disease.

The urgent brevity of a whippoorwill's call broke from far left. The coils of Cash's intestines jelled icily and his mouth dried out. His tongue stuck to the back of his teeth.

The *chump-chuck chump-chuck* of hoofs in the darkness brought him around with mouth open and hand gun snagged free. It was Struber, reining down now at the regulation three paces to the rear. Coming to a walk, pacing Cash. The studied sloppiness of a well-oiled salute rose and fell.

"Since noon, suh, we have covered twenty-six miles."

"Thank you. Take your post."

CASH'S spurs reminded his horse of the necessity for movement, and for ten minutes he kept his mouth open and his butt off the saddle the better to hear the night. There were no further bird calls.

He relaxed his muscles, lashed his brain to alertness, and considered the march. It was better, riding at night, and that was one of the few things in his favor. It was better because there was no blinding sunlight to baffle the eyes and throw range estimates out of focus. The narrow perimeter allowed by darkness was black and gray, movement and immobility, solid shapes and attached shadows. And there were fewer noises at night and hearing became better.

So Cashman Rodney cast an eye along the star fires and judged his course and the distance left to him. If I had a sextant I could force those stars to tell me exactly where I am! He guessed at a heading that would take them directly to the moraines this side of Phantom Forks, then passed the word for a trot.

He got it in a long breath of axle-grease and horse porousness and melting sweat that came from men unbathed for nine days. He got it in the whine of traces and chocking of hoofs and irregular bumping of butts warming to cold saddle leather. He got it in the cool wind of his passing that brushed against his skin and brought him the faded scent of burnt-out grasses and sun-dried cactus and the musk of hot cottonwoods.

He kept them at a shuffling trot until his own horse was moist, then he called for a gallop. It was a heavy gallop that brought with it the banging of wagons and bumping of hoofs and slap of leather on leather. It was a straight gallop that neither looped nor veered; and when Cash calculated that four miles had passed under his stirrups since the trot, he pulled down to a walk.

The unsteady *wheenk!* of drying axles and the blowing of horses and sneezing of men followed him down the darkness like some ethereal symphony played in Hades by a ragged train of imperishable ghosts.

He ordered a halt.

"Lift hoofs." He made his way on foot toward the wagons. "Reverse

blankets." Picking out No. 3's hood in the paling darkness, "See to cinchings." The hood was dark gray, like a tombstone, and the sinking moon made damp jewels on the team's eyes. "No water for the animals. We gallop in five minutes. One swig apiece for personnel—Struber!"

Rusty dropped down, stretched with the graceful litheness of a kitten, and searched for Cash's face. "Father's going to have a second lieutenant for breakfast."

"Father's not going to have anything for breakfast unless we get to those moraines and make a help message by fast horse. All right, Rusty girl?"

"All right, Cash." There was a scent of verbena to her; it clung to her shawl.

To Struber he said, "Corporal, we have sixteen miles to go. You point with Number One wagon. Washington closes the drag—Mr. MacKenzie!" Cash must go to No. 1 now and see to his wounded. It would be easier facing the colonel in the dark than in the daylight. "Mr. Mackenzie, issue the last of the ammunition plus one tin of airtights per head. Mr. Mackenzie, I specifically ordered you to ride in Number One with the pharmacy chest."

"Lord be on us, son, but I'm a civ and I stay with Miz' Mack in times of privation and travail—You seen a hymn book somewheres?"

"Mr. Mackenzie, I am not 'son,' I am Lieutenant Rodney by virtue of my contract with the United States. You may address me as 'Mister.' And by virtue of your contract with the Government you are under my order at this time."

Cash clutched the sutler by his soiled shirt, spun him around, then released him and placed the heel of his hand against the man's grimy collar and propelled him quickly toward the lead wagon.

"Rusty?" She was giggling and it made Cash feel better. He was not a hand at making speeches and she knew it. "Rusty, save one of those in that gun, girl."

COLONEL RUST was muttering through locked teeth and his hands flew erratically up and down his tunic and he kept feeling for his bent knee. Cash lay a wrist on the colonel's forehead and the skin was hot to the touch.

"Mearns?" Cash asked. "Can you move?"

Throatily, weakly, Mearns said, "Yessuh. I b'lieve so."

" 'Tend the colonel. The sutler'll help you."

A grayness was running with the wind across the eastern skies and little spurts of sand were spouting up and collapsing to nothingness. Cash ordered the guidon broken out—something Rust wouldn't have done on a tactical march—and when the leather casing was yanked free and the bunting snapped away from the staff the dawn light showed the white HQ delineated above the crossed sabers and the "10" below them.

Corporal Struber was grinning at it. He reached out for it. "Here boy, lemme carry that."

"On my command, Struber." Cashman Rodney strode to his horse, whipped a lean thigh over leather, and settled into the stirrups. Bit chains and saber chain and spur chains made a tinkling melody of their own for an instant.

The blue fork of the guidon was a snake's tongue defying the gauzy distances of coming day.

God rest your soul, Hollising. You can't feel this but we can, and maybe you're better off. But don't worry, Captain. We'll get her there all right, and we'll get the guidon there too, though I don't know how.

Struber called softly, "Washin'ton's posted, suh." The corporal had accepted the conditions which had placed Cash in command. Fatalism, after patience, is one of the qualities of a fighting man.

"Axles greased, Struber? Hocks and fetlocks seen to!" Those things were the mobility. There was no longer any surprise.

"Yes, suh." Struber gripped the guidon staff in a knob-knuckled fist.

Cash said, "Struber, the only hex you'll find is the one that's inside yourself. And it's you who'll have to lick it." Cashman Rodney shot an arm straight to the lightening skies. "For—ha-a-rd—trot!"

Dawn was a red-gummed old hag, wrapped in a musty gray shroud. She parted her lips in a threatful pink grin as if to devour the miniscule pieces of protoplasm that were hauling their wheeled toys across the yellowing desert below. And then she herself died in the flame-lash of the husky hot sun, and the echo of her death cackle was heard in the rattle of grasses crushed by rolling rims and shod hoofs.

Cash let them walk for fifteen minutes after sunrise, then signaled them up to the gallop. He forced them through the first half-hour of day at it. He halted them on a sandy rise and peered back across the sandy spaces and was pleased to note that the trail they'd cut was straight. No veering now, no wavering. Direct to the moraines this side of the Canadian, and if those rotund humps of earth offered no sanctuary for a stand, nothing ever would.

At the trot, near mid-morning; and the train was feeble with its tenth day of traveling. Feeble from having been flung out in advance of the main command for two weeks, an exposed nerve in the noisome mouth of a danger-haunted desert.

Mrs. Mackenzie, shaking and jouncing on the seat of No. 3 next to Rusty, was turning to Leviticus for solace. Mr. Mackenzie was helping Sergeant Mearns apply soaked kerchiefs to the trenched brows of the wounded in No. 1.

Corporal Washington—a full two-striper now, since notation of Reveille Without Formation in the morning report—was jogging easily at the drag and swiveling his head far left and far right. The corporal wished he had not tossed his mouth organ away.

Struber was wondering how long the horses and the axles would hold out at this pace. Struber was thinking, maybe those headband folks're content to leave us alone, and run our remuda back into the hills.

Rusty, dead-armed from driving and blinking against the weight of coming sleep, was whistling a saucy little tune she had heard down at Fort Cobb ten years before. Something about:

I'd like to be a packer
And pack with George F. Crook.
And wear a beard and ride a mule
And for him be mistook.

SHE POINTED her chalk-sooted chin up and arched her brows to see if she could spot Cash, riding far ahead.

She heard Struber's in-suck of breath and saw him snap his head away from the wagons. She heard Washington's thin cry, 'way to the rear.

She heard Mrs. Mackenzie's throat-stutter, "The devil have us!"

Cashman Rodney had neither heard nor seen any of those things because he was standing in his stirrups as he rode, focusing fatigue-shot eyes on the terrain ahead. Monstrous unbelief was entering him as he became convinced that the moraines were not up there and that the train must be far off-course due to its veering. There was nothing up there but a thumb-shaped hillock bearded with short timber.

And then he heard the snatting of shots and the triumph-swollen shrieks of the two-legged panthers from the hills to the south. They were hurling themselves in from three directions, from left rear, full rear, and right rear.

Cash wrenched around without finding his saddle and recognized the in-rushing animals as troop horses and not Apache ponies. Troop horses stripped to the bridle and greased for speed. He thought, Our remuda!

V

SEVERAL thoughts flashed through Cash's head at once. We must be on the Canadian—my schedule says so! That hillock must mark its course. The

Forks must be downstream, east. We missed 'em.

"Whip it! Whip it!" He was rough with his reins and savage with his spurs and his horse crow-hopped and spun and lined out back to the wagons.

"Washington! Form a horseshoe there and hold to it! Struber, keep those flanks alive! Get those teams rolling!"

There was no more stand left in the train, no more circle-to-fight-on-foot. It was a race for the high ground and if they didn't win it they would lay where the Apaches left them, to be picked clean by buzzards. To be buried up to their ears in sand and posed for the attention of the ants. To be staked out over roasting fires.

There was the growl of chains and snapping of hames and cracking of balk ends and the thickening tympannum of plunging hoofs. There was the steady, biting scythe of whips and the low-throated curses of teamsters.

"Pick 'em down! Pick 'em down!" Cash was bellowing anything he could think of. "Keep 'em to the rear! Don't let 'em flank us!"

Struber threw himself close in to No. 3, body slung around and down and low off-side, firing off his high-arched holding knee. The body-sway of the man was graceful as an eel. Smoke tatters broke from the running train and the split-ice bark of shots was staccato above the yelling. Two horses were down, then three, and the red riders were rolling and sprawling in the spinning alkali. One man tried to get up and Cashman Rodney aimed from the gallop and fired. The savage jerked to the cut of the bullet and thrashed convulsively to the gripping shackles of a shattered spine.

The yawing wagons and the pot-shooting flankers and the low-riding attackers thundered over all those and chopped them to bone-meat.

Cash had a flash view of Rusty laying her whip across the team, then dust flapped over No. 3 and Cash wanted to curse her for exposing herself. He triggered off one more shot and saw a patch-pony skid spraddle-legged from sight. That was when he took the bullet. It was a knife-slash in his shoulder, a razor cut in cat's fur. And then his shoulder was numb and his horse was plunging alongside lurching No. 1 and he had to hold on with his knees. The hillock was half a mile away and the stunted cottonwoods were naked-sharp to the stung eye.

A man screamed—a cawing, rubbly scream—and Trooper Neal arced upward off his saddle, flipped hat over boots once, and dropped into the smoking dust and screamed again. Exploding hoofs and snapping leather and the barking of carbines were his dirge.

A quarter mile to go now and Cash was fighting his left rein to bring his horse into a turn. A flint-headed shaft slid past. He saw the mahogany-muscled man with the bow and he aimed cross-shoulder and fired and missed and fired and hit and the man toppled drunkenly from sight as his pony flew free and was gone.

Then they were slowing to the upsloping of ground and the cottonwoods were large and near. Cash put himself onto the flank and pumped his arm at the timber. He saw Struber at No. 1 and Rusty on No. 3 with wind-tears canalizing the dusty mask of her face like warpaint. No. 3 shot up into the timber and the others rocked after it. Then Corporal Washington was on the slope and up the slope and Cash was alone on its shoulder.

Down below him was an endless milky surf of spreading alkali that already was melting at the edges and ruffling away to swirling opaqueness and in that tossing surf Cash saw heads flinging bodyless back and forth as outraged riders sought to band together again and make their wedge and drive into the train for the final kill.

"Ca-ash!" It was a distressed wail, a woman-wail.

Cash swung about, raked rowels and cantered into the timber. He threw off,

grabbed Rusty's slender upper arms and lifted her off the brown grasses and stared for miles into her eyes.

"Oh, Cashman!" She said it in sobs. "You're—hurt."

STRUBER was all over the place and Corporal Washington was gazing stretch-eyed at a torn sleeve and a bloody arm. From some place there rippled a chain of spang-sharp curses and suddenly Cash laughed because Rust was still alive. He dropped Rusty without letting her down for he had his answer now. He pumped across to Washington, belted the man in the neck, and commanded him to come out of it. The new corporal popped to attention and Cash gave him work to do.

"Team horses on one picket in the middle of the circle, troop horses to horse-holders." He added loudly, "One-in-four."

"Yass, dammit, one-in-four and next time you order a forced march without—"

Cash double-timed to the edge of the timber stand, sank to one knee, ripped off his hat and shaded his stinging eyes southward. The alkali surf was ankle-high only and the attack was reforming. Some of the naked Apaches were doing things to Neal's crumpled corpse and they were not nice things.

Fury howled up through Cashman Rodney and he had to brace against the impulse to sprint down the slope with saber swinging and hand gun cracking and teeth bare to the wind with foul insult. The childishness of that thought made him ashamed, and he took vicarious recovery of it in saying little words to dead Neal. "You did fine, soldier. You bled just like anybody bleeds. You bled for us. You'll be with Captain Hollising now, and there's no rank up there."

"Luh—tenant!"

Corporal Washington was at the edge of the man-high jack growth, hands cupped to rubbery mouth. Rings of salt were riming his armpits, like shark's teeth.

"Luh—tenant—they's the river yonner."

Cash reached the stunted trees and pushed around the circle of wagons. He frowned northward down the opposite side of the crest to where the Canadian sludged between viscous banks like the steady throb of some great artery.

He held his hand sideward in front of his face, fanned his fingers open and bisected the slope four ways. He judged each aperture to represent one hundred yards of space, and that put him a quarter-mile from the river.

Struber was saying thickly, "Tha's a long way to roll, suh." Struber swallowed with an effort. "I don' guess we'll make it."

"I don't, either."

Struber said. "They'll make a surround, suh."

"Yes." Cash could see it—could see the copper fist closing slowly around the wooded crest, could see it coming together, closing on the survivors and squeezing out the remnants for butchering. "They'd like us to try and cross that river."

"How wide would it be, suh?"

The dismounted command was digging rifle pits and piling boxes and crates under the beds, and the noise of all that was like the noise of people digging graves to Cash's numbing ears. He said, "About a mile. And a swift current."

Rusty trudged to No. 1's tilted hood, gripped the after hoop, and prepared to swing up to be with her father. Cash watched her stupidly. It surprised him that her leggings were greasy and stained and her blouse was shredded. There was a dark smear across one cheek, where the freckles had been. She climbed into No. 1.

"Mackenzie!" The thin green taste of bile was in Cashman's mouth and he felt sick. His hands were quivering with muscle-strain and he had trouble keeping his eyes open. And then it occurred to him that they all looked that way, that each of them was filthy and trail-

wracked and worn-out, ready to toss in the gauntlet and swap their lives for whatever odds they could hit. "Mr. Mackenzie!"

The rusty croak of the colonel's voice was audible from No. 1. He was trying to tell his daughter something. Cash couldn't hear what it was and he didn't want to hear what it was. He turned south and stood next to Washington and blinked wearily through the nooning sun to where the red riders below were milling to form for the attack.

Cash saw Rusty slide from No. 1 with her .44 naked in one hand. He made a fist and jerked it back toward the wagon.

SHE shook her head. "I'm going to Number Three, Cashman. That's where I belong." She gestured behind her. "Father has a bulldog pistol he says General Crook gave him. He says if Crook had put these people on reservations like he was paid to do, we'd be dealing whist at the Forks now. And he wants to know how in hell you got us this far in the wrong direction." She pulled herself up into No. 3 and wriggled under the hood.

The freshly-dug rifle pits under the wagon beds resembled shot holes in a browning corpse. The men were getting comfortable, easing their carbines this way and that, adjusting their shoulders and elbows and knees. They all seemed gray-green in the pale heat of noon.

Cash stepped around the circle in search of something that was wrong, but there was nothing wrong. Everything that could be done, out here in the emptiness of the Canadian's upper course, had been done.

A pain-washed old face appeared in the aft eye of No. 1 and Rust leveled his pistol on Cash and thumbed back the hammer. "What you need, mister," he said, "is a compass." The colonel lay his barrel on the gate and brought it over to the slope. "I make it this way. They'll hit direct once, pour through, then stay between us and the river and choke us. Retreat, Mr. Rodney, will be held in hell. I remind you that Retreat is not a formation, it's a ceremony. You will look your best."

Cash came down to one knee, balanced his gun arm on his raised thigh, and waited. He waited for less than the lift and fall of two breaths.

An endless wave of hard-down headbands washed onto the slope and brought with it the ear-shaking rumble of a hundred and fifty hoofs and the clicking of joints and the snorting of spread nostrils.

Cash said the only thing he could say. "Hold for a close target!"

He was suddenly conscious of his throbbing wound; it lanced his arm and chest like a blade, and he had to wince. He cocked his hand gun and took a breath.

The Apaches ascended onto the standing train like a huge copper broom sweeping everything before it. Then their lungs let go and their teeth were white-yellow in their dark faces and they descended on the wagons with the deafening impact of an avalanche.

A single volley from carbines pecked at them, shivered their front and lopped half a dozen from sight. The rest catapulted themselves against hoods and off-strakes and locked poles. They tumbled off and snaked under the wagon beds with knives in teeth and rifles recoiling to the erratic kick of repeater breechings. Animal grappled with animal in the rifle pits. There was a horrid red moment of reasonless fury and metal on muscle and sharp cries of defiance and agony.

Cash went deaf all at once. A short Indian with bandy legs was writhing clear of a rifle pit, lunging at Cash. He was diving right into him. The Indian struck as Cash fired and they rolled over and over with clawing fingers seekful of throats. Cash gagged to the rancidness that was on him and flung spit. He found his gun grip, got off two shots, and felt the stinking weight relax. He kicked it free, got to his knees, and saw Struber

swinging a carbine stock in great, swift circles. He saw Struber's carbine connect with a bare skull. There was the sickening sound of a kicked cigar box and bright gray brain dottle spewed into the smoke and Struber broke forth with a triumphant shriek and flopped backward. He dropped his carbine and fingered at the shaft that quivered deep in his short ribs.

Unaccountably Cash recalled that Apaches do not take scalps. He whipped off his hat and pitched it at a scrambling pony, got off his last shot and punched the rider off the animal's back.

Unaccountably he remembered that Mr. Mackenzie had not answered him and he conjured up an image of the sutler quaking on the mat of No. 3's bed with hands vibrating under that absence of all reason that is total fear.

The Apaches broke through. They broke through shredded wagon hoods and smashed strakes and howled down on the horse herd and fell on it as a wolf pack vises its jaws into huddled ewes.

THEY macerated their own dead and wounded with stamping hoofs and they flowed over the rifle pits and left blue-clad Buffaloes flattened like squashed grapes. The flat, steady bark of a .44 coughed from half-careened No. 3. Rusty was saying things through her teeth and in those teeth she held the chewed end of her shawl knot. A light-skinned Indian with a yellow headband that had been cut from some trooper's side-stripes weeks before sprang at her, landed on her, and ripped her blouse down to her leggings. He wrestled her over the gate and down to the axles, thumped her onto her back, raised a fist and swung it downward.

Cash's hearing returned in a storm-burst of hellish racketing as he shoved himself off his knees and landed full weight on the Apache's back and felt for his swollen wind-pipe. He got it, pegged in hard, and felt it crush. The man whirled and doubled a knee and Rusty's gun exploded. The Indian's face came apart in the out-passage of the bullet and the featureless mash of cartilage and bone sagged loose.

"Rusty, for God's sake, get—"

A banshee scream rose organ-strong from the other side of the circle where Mr. Mackenzie crouched frozen in the face of the fear-blinded herd. Then he was under it and it was thrashing onto him and over him and away. It sluiced through the gap where the splintered remnants of No. 4 wagon were. It carried its own smoke down-slope toward the river and left scarred earth and stained black broadcloth in its wake.

There was scattered hip-shooting and someone threw a knife. A man fell on his chest and the knife slocked into a tree and stayed there.

Then the redmen were gone. They were gone in a long spread of foam-rilled haunches and flailing arms and bobbing headbands. And the last of the train horses went with them.

VI

LIEUTENANT RODNEY put his back to what had been Mr. Mackenzie, and almost collided with Corporal Struber. Struber was sitting against a wheel hub. There were no pupils in his up-rolled eyes and his under-jaw was swinging gently to and fro, like a lamb chop on a string. One blue hand was wrapped around the shaft in his ribs.

Rusty darted to No. 1 and called her father's name. Cash heard that personage command her to enter.

Corporal Washington was standing wide-legged in the smoke curtains, examining a metallic object he held in both hands. He was smiling. He faced up and showed the thing to Cash. "My mouth organ, suh. One of them must've dropped it." He lay it into his bleeding lips, inhaled, and sounded a chord. "That's fine."

Cash snagged it from him, thrust it into the man's beltings, and put his face almost to Washington's. "Corporal, you're ranking non-com fit for duty. We

now reorganize. They're circling us, they're all around us. So we tally. Count their dead—I'll tag ours. We'll bury 'em in the rifle pits. I want to know a ratio of strength because that's what they'll want to know. Got it?"

Washington got it.

We're helpless! Cash almost said it aloud. They'd lost their surprise element a week before but always had they retained their mobility. And now that was gone and there remained only the ludicrous image of a column that was snail-paced and noisy, helpless on foot, and gasping under the anchoring weight of its own equipment.

Where have I seen that image before? Ah yes, with knights and armor and a schoolgirl's dreams.

Mid-day went over into afternoon and the dead were committed to shallow pits where they had died. Cash received the report from Corporal Washington. Twenty-two men and seven wagons and two females. Six rounds apiece for the survivors, not counting ammunition yet to be pried from the bandoleers of the buried.

Rusty came to Cash then and her face was empty of expression. There was no light in her eyes whatever. "Cash. Father thinks we can hold out here. Cash, don't laugh! He isn't right, I know. But I had to tell you anyway. He thinks we can defend this ground."

"I wasn't laughing. I was just thinking of a truism—about high ground always being defensible." He added bitterly, "Until you haven't got enough men to defend it with!" The sad smile faded from his heavy mouth. "Rusty, you saved one?"

"Yes." She got a breath and said it again, more strongly. "Yes, I have one bullet."

Cashman Rodney commenced to reload for what must be, for him, the last time. He thumbed waxed cartridges into the chamber with clumsy, fumbling motions. He was woefully sorry for all of them. Below, on the spreading hips of the slope, rode the Apaches, riding high in arrogant triumph. Their fingers were locked around this long-sought quarry now and it was soft for the killing and ready for the eating.

"Rusty, what're you thinking about? I'm thinking about you and me and what maybe might have been. I'm—"

"I'm thinking about Hannibal."

"About—"

"Hannibal. He went down the Alps with elephants—remember? And someone used elephants against the Persians once—I forget who—but the elephants swaggered in and chased everyone away."

She was picking at her pinned-up blouse, not looking at it.

"Hully Moses!" Cash holstered and whacked his palms together and called to Corporal Washington. "Break out axes from the limber strakes! I want wagon-length limbs or trunks or whatever'll fit! Lash 'em on each side the healthiest three wagons as well as Number One. Skip to it!"

Colonel Rust was snarling in delirium again and Mrs. Mackenzie was crying softly into her handkerchief. Presently both were drowned out in the savage *clock!* of blades biting into green wood.

"We can float 'em, hey, Rusty?"

"After we get them there." A thought came to her—one more thought in this day of wild thinking. "How'll you steer?"

Cash had that figured. "We'll chain the front axles rigid and square across. Washington! Louder there! And faster! Make 'em think we're building a redoubt!"

THE Apaches fell away in a restless circle and came together in knots and conferred and fell away again. They were concentrating their strength by the river; the quarry could never escape by land. They had left a moon full of suns up on that slope—thirty of their number — but they had whittled down the buffalo soldiers to half their strength and now the time was ripe for the finish. But what was occurring up there?

Cash was vibrant with excitement. "Corporal! The women and ten men ride in Number One. Four men each in the other three wagons. I'll be in the center. We'll roll 'em abreast right into the river. We can fire over the float logs and fend off with poles. Get poles—two to a wagon. And make damn sure those axles are straight across!"

Rusty dragged Mrs. Mackenzie into No. 1, and Rusty's father demanded to know what the hell George Crook meant by taking nurses into the field, and Rusty told him, "To tend the gardens" and the colonel bawled for an orderly and a quart of bourbon.

Cashman Rodney kept a man at the brake handle of each wagon and put the rest at the wheel spokes fore and aft, then leaned into it himself. At the crest, just north of the timber and overlooking the river, he put the brakemen inside the wagons, tossed the last of the bandoliers into the four wagon beds, then trotted to the tail-gate of No. 1, placed a shoulder against it, and heaved.

A rageful howl of anger wailed from the banks below. Horsemen began to gather, and a shot slapped smartly. The ominous resonance of running hoofs sounded from the southern slope.

"Heave in there! Sway to it!"

Cash felt his boots sink into the sand as he strained at the wagon's weight. Then the rims turned and the momentum of ten men swaying forth and backward together took hold. No. 1 creaked away from the crest.

Washington had already started two of the other three wagons and he clambered aboard one as it rolled down toward the river.

Howls came again from below, this time uncertainly and with less anger. Hoofs were loud behind the crest, and another shot sliced into the trees.

Cash double-timed at the gate of the last wagon for a few paces, eying the uprigged pole in front and hoping it wouldn't swing too far left or right. Then he was up on the gate, snaking his way under the hood, was stumbling forward to the box and behind it. He hooked his elbows on the back of the seat, lifted out his hand gun, and braced hard against the jouncing lurch of the free-rolling wagon. He breathed a prayer that No. 1 would take water nicely and stay that way.

Apache bullets fired in awe cracked into the logs, rang off the hoops, and chocked into the strakes. Cash was hoarse with lung-fatigue.

"Save your shots! Use 'em in the water, not here!"

"Looten'nt?" It was Trooper Vernon, clay-faced and damp. "They comin' over the slope!"

Apaches spewed from the axed tree trunks—those who had been circling to southward — jumped their ponies over the strewn remains of No. 4 wagon and came together with the sure speed of a slung lance. They descended on the rocking, bumping wagons with weapons hot in toughened palms.

A gladsome shout came from the right and Cash saw No. 1 make white-water in the current and sink, bubbling, to its top strakes. Then it rose to the buoyancy of float logs, broached the hard current, tipped dangerously, but righted itself and moved downstream. Fluffs of smoke spat from behind its logs.

A muffled drumming brought Cash's head around fast to the slope. His lungs emptied in relief as he saw three front riders spill, hit, skid and spin into a tangled mass. The rest piled up and there was a circus of gleaming flesh and steaming pony hides and hocks and legs and feet and heads.

As the second wagon plowed into the current Apaches hurled themselves at it, but were blown back into the wake of the third. One man — features hideous with hate and frustration—sprang onto a pitching hood and fired once into the canvas, then slipped to his knees. A silver flicker rose from the torn canvas and the man's head dropped back as if his neck had been on hinges. He slid into the stream and the razor was withdrawn as neatly as it had been extended.

LIEUTENANT RODNEY thought his knees were split and his breastbone had cracked open. The wagon bogged into the water, half-braked from the resistance of it.

"Now fire at will!"

He was going deaf again, he told himself. The metallic ringing in his ears and the dizziness in his head were numbing him. He tried to brace for a shot but the seat gave way. He collapsed on one knee, wet to the armpits. Angry whip-lashes were in the air and there was the *thung!* of bullets through canvas. Trooper Vernon jack-knifed forward with a slug in his stomach, and someone had to save him from drowning.

Then all four wagons were dipping downstream like distended gray beasts, headless and helpless in the racing sinews of the current.

Cash used the lopsided seat as a parapet. He remembered reloading three times, until he had nothing left to reload with. He recalled sucking his thumb knuckle where the recoil of his gun had burned the bone raw. And he never forgot forming the words, "Swim for it! We're cut off!"

But he never uttered the words because the running fight was over and they were not cut off. Half the remaining Apache ponies had been pistoled off flying hoofs and the others had circled into the safety of the moraines.

It was at the moraines that Cash had thought they were cut off because he could hear the clump of guns and the high cries of male voices raised in lust. And it was at the moraines that No. 1 caught on a spit, tipped, and held. Fur-hatted men came out from shore with knees and rifles high, as men will walk through snow drifts.

A man with an ambush of beard picked up Rust like a broken doll and swung him ashore. "Thought you were kind of late." He set the colonel down and produced a flask that was sweet to the cork with whisky. "We come out from the Forks to meet you." He retrieved his flask, astonished at the colonel's capacity. "Glad you brought them bug-teats with you. We been needing a fight with 'em lately."

Cash couldn't wait for his pole man to lever the water-logged wagon inshore. He jumped in shoulder deep, waded to the bank, and reached Rusty as she was unwinding her shawl and letting her hair spill down her back.

She tied the shawl around her waist, got her gun and flipped it and caught it and offered it to him butt-first. "In case you think I can't handle one, Cash—for you."

He thought, I love you intensely, Rusty. I'd like to start a garden with you in the fine new soil of the Forks and I vow we'll pull nothing up. It'll grow for us.

Rust twisted his old neck that way and glared. Cash remembered, Mr. Rodney, mind-reading is not a luxury for lieutenants. You got anything to tell her, tell her out loud, dammit!

Cash said, "We have music. Corporal Washington must know the Wedding March."

Colonel Rust was on hands and knees, lower lip rolled out. "What the hell ever possessed you to bust those wagons into the river like that? Don't stare at me—I'm lucid!"

Cashman Rodney took in and let out one long breath. "Maybe it was an old school book of your daughter's, sir. Or maybe a dream."

"Hey?" Rust lurched to his sodden feet and clutched the bearded trapper for support. "And I s'pose you think ahead in these days of gunpowder and see men in horseless wagons rolling against the enemy all snug?"

"It could be, sir, it could be."

Colonel Rust whickered in bafflement. "Keep your hat on in the sun, mister! And since I'm in command of this detail again, I'll issue an order at the present—now! Take Evening Stables, Mr. Rodney!" And Rust sagged against the trapper and had his hand on the flask before the man could reach it himself.

COW-COUNTRY QUIZ

②WHY DID MILITARY OFFICIALS ON THE FRONTIER HATE "SNOW-BIRDS?"
①WHAT IS MEANT BY "PINNING THE CRAPE ON THE KID?"
③HORACE GREELEY SAID, "GO WEST, YOUNG MAN" ...BUT WHAT IS A "GO EASTER?"
④SPEAKING OF STAGECOACHES...WHAT WAS AN "EXCUSE-ME-MA'AM?"
⑤THIS COWBOY IS "RAISING" A TREE...DO YOU KNOW HOW?

The answers are on Page 145—If you MUST look!

QUESTIONS HUNTING

Question: I'm a bass fisherman, but can't eat the things. Is there any way that they can be prepared to make them more tasty? I find that they have an odor, even when freshly caught, and especially when water is low in fall.—Tim Bullich, Omaha, Neb.

Answer: Bass do have an odor, all their own. They are also good eating, but require more skillful preparation than most fish. The best way is to clean them under running water. Never use them in any way except by filleting, so that the skin is removed, for this is where the odor and the strong taste lies. Make a cut behind the gills, across the body. Run a thin, sharp knife down to the bone on each side of the back line. Make a cut across the tail. Loosen

the meat to the bone here, grab this portion with a pair of pliers, and by running the sharp knife along the ribs, remove the fillet from each side. Now put the fillets skin side down on a board. Run the thin knife between meat and skin, flat, with pressure enough to bend the blade. Soak the two white, succulent appearing steaks in salt water over night. The best way, the most heavenly way to cook them, is like doughnuts, in deep, smoking fat, preferably peanut oil. Cooked this way your bass will be fit for a king's table.

Question: Did the early day hunters and trappers of the cattle country ever use skiis, or is this a more modern method of travel, brought over from Scandinavian countries?—Harold Oleson, Mankato, Minn.

Answer: Unfortunately skiis were not widely used in the plains country in the early days, at least not to my observation. I used them, finding them to be ideal for trap-line travel on the prairie, though useless in working cattle. The plains country seldom had loose snow, where snow shoes were indicated. Rather they had hard packed snow, or crust, perfect for skiis. Also, as kids, with a sail on the back, we used the high winds that so often prevailed to scoot along at a hair-raising clip. I ran trap line on skiis in Montana in the early 1900's.

Question: There are several types of surplus revolvers being advertised at the present time in varied calibers. The price is so low that I wonder if these are any good. What do you think about buying them?—Virgil Smith, Denver, Colo.

Answer: I have noticed these ads by various arms outfits and out of curiosity ordered a .45 in Smith & Wesson make. To judge value I ordered it in merely good shooting condition, though I note that most of these guns are advertised in good, better and excellent condition. My weapon was some battered, but in fine shooting condition, with no noiticeable looseness in the cylinder when the hammer was cocked and

trigger drawn in shooting position. In purchasing these surplus army revolvers I'd stick to the two top American brands, Colt and Smith & Wesson, avoiding those manufactured in foreign countries. I imagine if you order in what is termed very good to excellent condition that you'll get a very nice weapon. If you order and get a lemon, don't blame me. I'm merely stating my experience. Maybe I was lucky.

Question: I'm thinking of buying a .218 Bee for general hunting. Most of this will be done on varmints, but I do go after deer once a year. Do you think that the .218 Bee would be a good buy for me?—Roy Dillehunt, Bismark, N. Dak.

Answer: The .218 Bee is a nice little target rifle, a honey for varmints up to 200 yards, where it only has a 3.8 drop when using Super Speed or Super X loads. At three hundred yards, where its trajectory rises to 11.5 inches, it is not so hot. In speaking of deer hunting, however, one must bear in mind that the .218 has only 265 foot pounds of its original 835 pounds of muzzle energy remaining at 200 yards. This makes it of little use for deer, and its use on such large game is banned in many states, as it should be. In comparison, the commonly used 30-30 has a muzzle energy of 1930 foot pounds, using the 150 grain bullet, and has 960 foot pounds of this wallop remaining at 200 yards. Get the little Bee for varmints, but pack something bigger for deer. I used the .218 this spring and was highly pleased with its accuracy and light recoil.

& FISHING ANSWERS

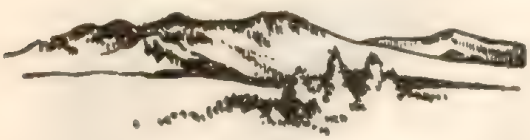
Question: I make my own flies and get a kick out of gathering my own materials. How do you go about preserving bird and animal skins for this use? —Arthur Trainor, Amesbury, Mass.

Answer: Tack the skins down on a board, skin or feather side down. Scrape off all flesh and fat, and wash with soap and water. Boil 4 ounces of alum in a quart of strong salt water.

Apply this to the skins heavily enough so they are coated white with it when dry. Store in a covered box with moth crystals.

Question: The east coast has ruined most of its streams with sewerage and industrial pollution. They killed off our runs of salmon and other fish. Now they are spending millions trying to bring them back again. How about the west coast? Is this same cycle going on there?—Conover Oldham, Boston, Mass.

Answer: Unfortunately, yes, but with more awareness than was apparent in the east. I do not think that the cycle of destruction will swing so far here. In the west it is the logging interests, rather than sewerage, that stamp giant boots on fish life. We do have sewerage problems in large streams, such as the Willamette and Columbia, and their main tributaries. In the Willamette fall runs of salmon



have already been exterminated by sewerage and industrial waste. In the Rogue and Umpqua we have had near extermination of the runs by diversion of fingerlings into unscreened irrigation ditches, smothering of spawn by mining mud. This also is true in California streams. But in the numerous Pacific tributaries, where the future salmon angling lies for our children, it is the logging interests who build dams without fish ladders on every rill and brook, run bull-dozers in the spawning beds, cover the spawn with mud. Awareness of the rapidly mounting situation is bringing about correction on the west coast before it is too late. Irrigation ditches are being screened, sewerage cleaned up, mining mud controlled. The logging deal is more difficult to handle, due to its widespread nature, where one man running a small operation on a tiny feeder tributary to a river can smother a complete four year cycle of Chinook salmon before any action is taken. Alert sportsmen's clubs are joining hands over the state to combat this, and in many instances with full co-operation of all law enforcing agencies, and sometimes with the co-operation of the logging interests themselves. It is the little guy here, the shoestring operator, rather than the big outfits, as in the east, that is the thorn in the side of future sporting generations The west coast is starting to guard its apples.

Question: I have a new pump, full-choke shotgun, in 12 gauge, to be used on ducks, pheasant and grouse. What is the effective range on these birds, in relation to size of shot used?—R. L. Mathews, Milwaukee, Wis.

Answer: A shotgun has the longest killing range with the shot it patterns best, regardless of size, unless we go up into scatterbore shots with buckshot or marbles. Standard sizes of shot for duck, grouse and pheasant are fours, fives, and sixes. Many hunters carry all three, and in my opinion this is a mistake, for the chances are good that the gun they carry patterns one or the other best. That is the one

to use. Shoot varied sizes of shot with your new gun at a thirty inch circle of paper, set at thirty yards, check the shot distribution for uniform coverage, without holes that birds could fly through, and choose for regular use, day in day out, the size shot that patterns best. You'll kill farther with number six, if this patterns best, than you will with the larger number four, if it doesn't fit the gun, for it is density of shot, not size, within reason, that kills.

A True Story of Tombstone

The Lawyer Loses a Bet

By NORMAN B. WILTSEY

NOT all the residents of tough Tombstone, Arizona, were miners, cowboys or gunfighters. Probably the most colorful character in all Tombstone's lurid history was its eloquent lawyer, Allen R. English.

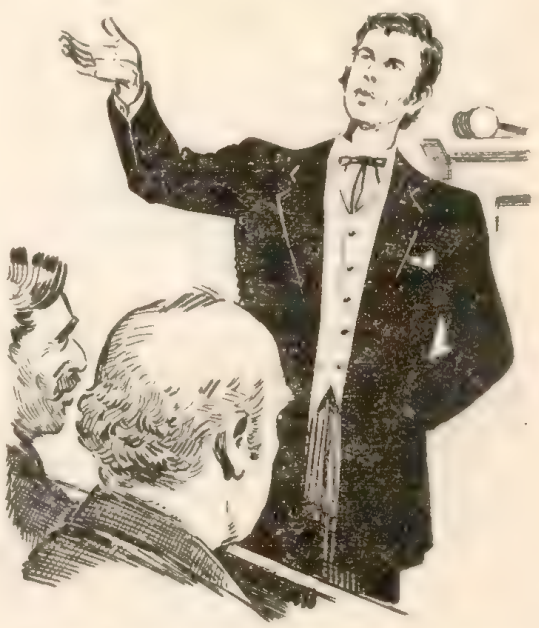
Six feet two inches tall and built in proportion, English presented an imposing figure in the courtroom. Dramatically tosing his thick mane of iron-gray hair back from his forehead and striding back and forth before his spellbound jury, he made strong men weep tears of pity for hardened murderers.

The legend persists in Tombstone that he could thunder on for hours without repeating a word. Highly educated and widely read; most, if not all, of English's discourses were too profound for his simple listeners' understanding, but he never let fact hamper his sonorous delivery.

Sensitive to the slightest lapse of interest on the part of his audience, he knew to the split-second when to quit pouring on the oratory and ask a juror in the front row for a chaw of tobacco. The people loved the big lawyer and couldn't bear to convict his clients no matter how strong the case against them might be.

Even more extraordinary than his immense erudition was English's capacity for hard liquor. He drank anything and everything at all times—redeye whisky, *mescal*, *tequilla*, Apache *tiswin*, or —when these potent beverages were unobtainable—plain alcohol and water. Emerging carefully, yet with stately dignity, from Billy King's saloon one midnight, he blearily observed the full moon sailing high overhead. Drawing himself painfully erect, he declaimed in his best Shakespearean manner: "Thou art full, O Moon—thou lovely, glowing Queen of Night!" Then—struck with the obvious fact—he added happily, "But you ain't a damn bit ahead of me!"

Later in life English served three terms as District Attorney and performed an excellent job. Indeed, he



English presented an imposing figure

might have become U.S. District Attorney for the entire Territory of Arizona had not a mysterious enemy played a scurvy, unsporting trick which effectively ruined his big opportunity to ascend the legal ladder.

The burly lawyer was holding forth one night in magnificently convivial fashion at Billy King's bar when his light-hearted conversation chanced to touch briefly upon San Juan's Day—the great holiday soon to be celebrated on June 24 by Tombstone's numerous Mexican residents.

Apache Harris—a dark-visaged, saturnine individual who invariably took a gloomy view of everything—commented that it was too damn bad rain always fell on that day to spoil everybody's fun.

LAWYER ENGLISH took instant and violent exception to this pessimistic statement. "Sheer peasant superstition!" he boomed scornfully. "This year, my friends, not one drop of rain will fall to dampen the pleasures of these simple folk on their holiday. The inflexible law of averages—of mathematical chance—forbids it."

Harris snorted derisively. "The hell you say! Bet you a quart of whiskey it rains—best whisky in the house."

English drew himself up majestically to his full six feet two. "Taken—and if it rains, my skeptical friend, I will not only buy you whisky but strip off my clothes and stand naked as Father Adam under Billy's waterspout!"

Now here was a wager in the true Tombstone t r a d i t i o n—the bold and sweeping gesture of a gambling man willing to back his convictions to the absolute limit. Every sport in town heard of Lawyer English's gloriously reckless bet—and pulled shamelessly for rain on June 24th!

On the morning of San Juan's Day, the betting contestants repaired to Billy King's to await the Rain Gods' verdict. They didn't have to wait long. Dark clouds boiled in from the Dragoon Mountains within the hour, and the rains descended in torrents. At the height of the storm, Lawyer Allen R. English, dignified candidate for the exalted post of United States Attorney for Arizona, stepped plumb naked from the front door of Billy King's place and gamely took his stance under the streaming waterspout at the edge of the saloon porch.

From the porch of a rooming house across the street came a sudden blinding flash of light—the flash-powder explosion of a photograph being taken! English roared like an angry lion and dashed back to the sanctuary of Billy's bar—but the damage had been done.

The furious lawyer never could discover who had played him false in this treacherous manner, but the finished photo was mailed anonymously to Washington with this damning inscription printed on the back:

"This is Allen R. English—the "man" you are considering for the post of United States Attorney."

That did it!

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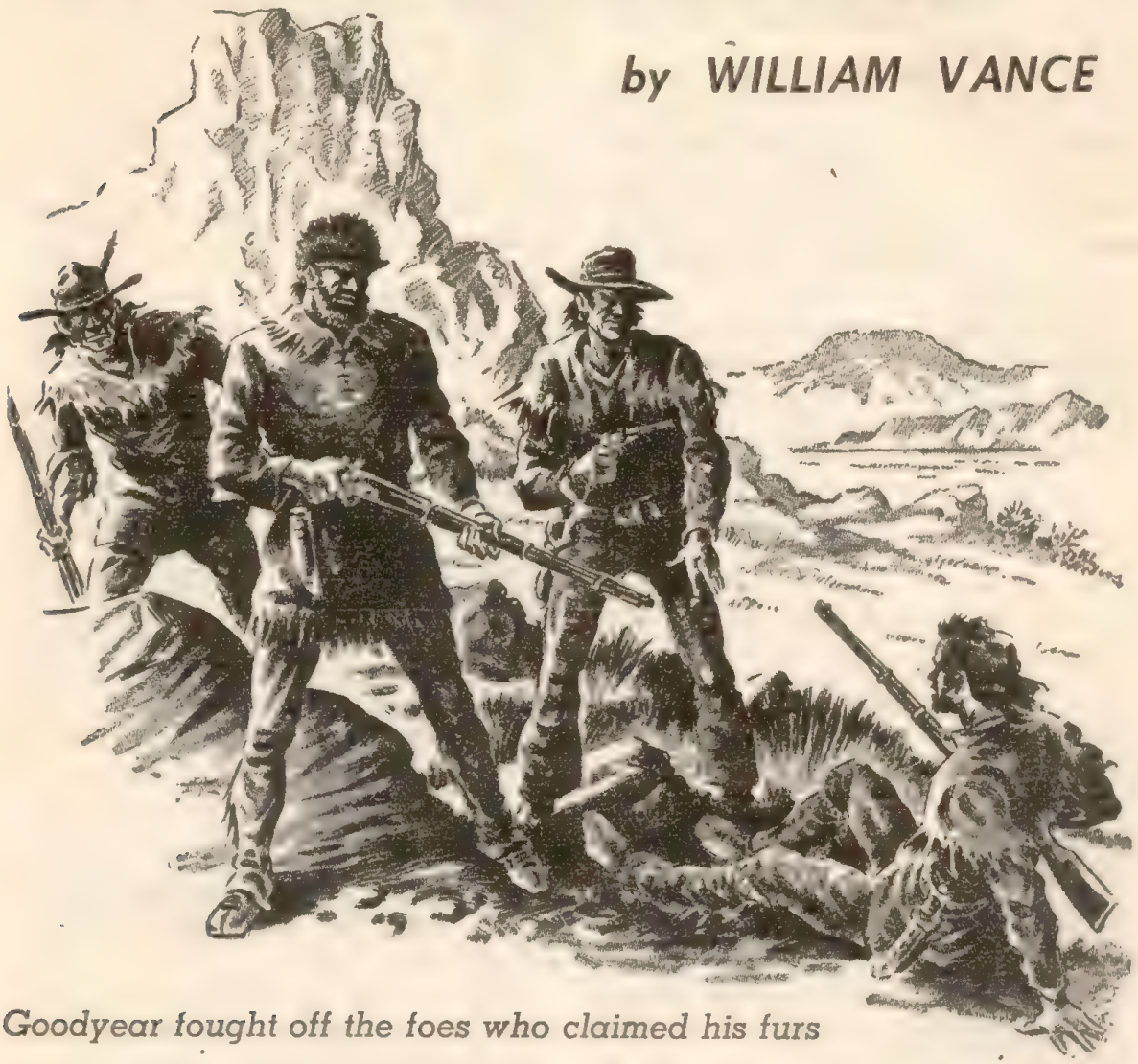
THE RED MARE

by WILLIAM VANCE



Goodyear fought off the foes who claimed his furs

or his scalp, but he gave up his heart without a struggle

FRANK GOODYEAR didn't argue with Yellow Cloud. He was spare with words anyhow; and now he figured it was time to listen. The gist of Yellow Cloud's talk was that Goodyear would be a lot better off if he got out of the country quick.

"'Yalea,' you're my friend," Yellow Cloud repeated. "You go quick." He stood straight, his one feather waving in the light chinook that swept up the Muddy, burning the snow cover and leaving the ground soft with mud. The wind felt good through Goodyear's tattered buckskin.

Goodyear puffed on his pipe and listened, nodding as Yellow Cloud explained in his rapid-fire clicking Arapahoe why his warriors donned their war paint. A wagon train had fired on them when they were merely curious. The scout party had been wiped out. Any-

way, his men were afraid they'd become like old women, being banned to a certain country and told they could not leave its boundaries.

Goodyear was not reluctant to leave. Especially since Tullich and his two half-breed renegades had visited him the day before and eyed his cache of beaver pelt with avaricious eyes. He'd told Tullich he was leaving in ten days. If he got away at once, he might evade the ambush he knew Tullich would be planning for him.

"I owe my brother much, now," Goodyear said gravely, while these thoughts flitted through his troubled mind. "I'm sorry I cannot repay you with more than this." He extended his tobacco pouch and Yellow Cloud accepted it. "All my goods have gone for trade and I've nothing now except the wealth of your hunters."

Yellow Cloud nodded as he emptied half the pouch into his own and returned the good buckskin bag reluctantly. "You have not tried to cheat us, Yalea," he said simply. "I am sorry you must go this way."

Goodyear straightened his bulk, a lithe, lean well-built man who moved easily for all the bigness of him. The Indians called him Yalea, which means simply, He is Beautiful, and this irked Goodyear, at first. But the Arapahoes had treated him well; in spite of the fact that unmarried Indian girls had looked on him with favor. Goodyear was a business man first. "There's just one favor, Yellow Cloud," he said. "My riding mare strayed off with your herd—"

Yellow Cloud smiled one of his rare smiles. He waved his hand toward the ridge and Goodyear turned to watch as two riders hazed his mare toward the soddy, by which he and the Indian chief stood. The mare had a colt, he noticed, long-legged, rangy and blood-colored, and with a sudden start he realized he'd been in this country for more than a year.

"My people wish to keep the young one," Yellow Cloud explained, "and they feel it is not unjust, considering the foal came from one of our stallions."

Goodyear nodded agreement and knocked the dottle from his pipe against the hard heel of one big hand. He had no interest in the colt. It would impede his flight. He knew when he left his soddy, some of Yellow Cloud's warriors would consider him legitimate game; and there was Tullich, red-bearded and green-eyed who'd cut his throat for the ragged buckskin he wore. The beaver pelts were worth a small fortune. If he could get them out.

GOODYEAR moved out that night, between sundown and moonrise. Driving four pack animals heavily-laden with beaver, he rode the chestnut mare along the well-defined trail beside the Muddy, heading south for Ferrytown, more than two hundred miles distant. The mare was skittish and kept trying to turn back. He knew she missed her colt. He tried not to think about it, but it was hard. He was fond of the chestnut. She was the fastest horse he'd ever owned, with stamina too. And she knew she belonged to him in spite of ranging with the Indian ponies for more than a year.

Smell of spring was on the soft night air, with cedar, pine and sage intermingled. Goodyear rode boldly along the ancient Indian trail, secure in the knowledge that no war parties would be abroad so soon. Too, he reasoned, Tullich would give him a day's travel from the camp of Yellow Cloud before making his bid. He pushed the mare steadily, stopping for a breathing spell near midnight, for the horses were soft; then he pushed on until near daylight.

When the sky lightened off to his left, making a dark, cardboard silhouette of the near mountains, he pulled off the trail. He pushed the mare back into a dense growth of cedar and made camp. The cedars were so thick, the ground was free of snow patches and was dry. He stripped the pack animals and examined their backs carefully for raw spots. He had to be careful now. He

regretted there was no feed in the cedars, but he figured to let the animals graze in the late afternoon, before he traveled on. He staked out the horses and squatted on his haunches gnawing on a piece of pemmican. Then he rolled in his blankets near the mare, with his rifle cradled in his arms. He was asleep instantly.

He woke like an animal, sleepiness gone, gripping the Spencer. He looked at the sky through the cedars and then at the mare. She had her head raised, her ears pointed toward the river. The pack animals were all looking in the same direction. In the midday light, he could see his trail, plainly, coming into his camp. He cursed softly.

Faintly now, he could hear the clicking chatter of an Arapahoe. He strained his ears but he couldn't make out what was said. He slid out of his blankets and circled the camp, heading for the river. He went swiftly and quietly, his moccasined feet noiseless as the passage of a snake. In a few minutes he was skirting the cedars on the upwind side of a small party of five bucks in war paint. They sat their horses and he knew they were examining his tracks. He laid out a handful of cartridges beside him and waited patiently, while the party argued excitedly among themselves. A brave he recognized as Crippled Pony wanted to go in and pick him off; the others insisted on returning to the main camp to report the presence of a wagon train to the south. Goodyear stood up then and walked toward them, not feeling the boldness that marked his stride.

They whirled their horses, poised for flight or fight. He stopped and held up his hand, palm outward. "How," he said gravely, and then quickly in Arapahoe, "I had my brothers under these sights," and he patted his rifle, "But I know them for my good friends. I have lived with them in peace for many moons. I have no wish to harm them."

They looked stolidly at Goodyear, and he held his breath. The scar-faced brave, Crippled Pony, and a close friend of Yellow Cloud's said, "What you say is true. We wish you no harm, either. But white men are not good for the country and for us. They kill and rob and steal when they profess to be our friends. This is not good."

Goodyear said, "All white men are not alike. There are good and bad, just as you know all Indians are not good."

Crippled Pony nodded seriously, enjoying the parley. He kicked his horse in the ribs with a moccasined foot and in a sudden flurry, Goodyear found himself surrounded.

Goodyear looked them over with a calmness he didn't feel. He'd lived with these Indians for the past year and he knew them well. A chance remark, a gesture and there'd be trouble. He shoved his rifle at one of Crippled Pony's companions and said, "Hold this for me."

The Indian accepted the rifle with no show of emotion. Goodyear whirled and grabbed Crippled Pony around the waist and hauled him from the plunging horse. He threw the Indian over his head with a flying mare and Crippled Pony landed with a thud and a grunt. Goodyear was on him and he pinned the Indian down and laid his knife point on the brown pulsating throat.

"I do not wish to harm my brothers," he panted. "I do not take Indian scalps. I only wish to go in peace."

"Peace is yours," grunted Crippled Pony.

GOODYEAR stood aside and Crippled Pany rose slowly. He stared at Godyear for a full minute while his companions clacked softly, pointing out the reasonableness of Goodyear's action. The man holding the Spencer offered it to Goodyear and the trapper sighed inwardly as he accepted it.

He watched them ride up-river and then he went moodily back to his camp. He didn't like the looks of things.

He led the mare and pack animals outside the cedars on the mountainside, away from the river. He staked them out to graze and then had a long look

around before he climbed up the brush-covered slope above the horse. He picked out a spot high up on the hog-back in a cluster of rocks. He filled his pipe and then thrust it back into his pocket, feeling a mounting irritation at the turn of events. He had a fortune in beaver pelt down there in the cedar. It represented a year of incredible hardship; hunger and cold and countless miles of trap lines run in the wet beaver dam country that spread to the north. It meant many weary hours of shrewd bargaining. It represented his future security and he'd gambled his life for it and the wheel was still turning.

A scratching, scraping noise brought him alert and his fingers gripped the rifle. He raised his head cautiously above the rocks and relaxed as a brown bear waddled down the slope above him. The bear was thin and his skin hung in folds. The animal stopped and stood on his hind feet, his head moving back and forth as he caught the strange scent. Then with a half-frightened woof he scampered back in the direction from which he came. Goodyear rose and went swiftly down the slope. The horses had not grazed enough but instinct drove him to motion. He gathered up the string and led them back to his camp. He packed swiftly and in less than half an hour was riding south, this time off the trail and away from the river. The going was slower, but he figured it to be safer.

Frank Goodyear dismounted stiffly and slowly pulled his pipe from a pocket in his ragged shirt. He scraped the last of his tobacco from his pouch and tamped it carefully into the pipe while his gray eyes searched the smoking ruins of the wagon train. His chestnut mare, still irritable from leaving her colt with Yellow Cloud's warriors, snorted and tugged at the reins.

"Sure a mess, ain't it?" Goodyear spoke to the mare from habit. The ache in his stomach was caused by more than his two or three days on pemmican and water. The wagons had been overturned and their contents pillaged and scattered; finally they had been burned and the smoke still rose in the still air. The charred bodies of three men lay among the rims and iron parts that had been a Conestoga. Off to his right another lay with an arrow protruding from his shoulder blades. The two front wheels of a one-horse rig were all that escaped the flames.

He stooped and picked up a blue and white mustache cup that lay at his feet, overlooked by the raiders. The lettering on the cup said FATHER in ornate gold lettering. Goodyear thrust it into his saddle bags and mounted, anxious to be gone.

The mare moved a dozen steps when Goodyear heard the strange, half-animal, half-human sound. He stopped, lifting the Spencer, searching the terrain with alert eyes. The sound came again and Goodyear used his knees to push the mare in that direction, while he cocked the Spencer and held it ready.

HE MUTTERED a soft curse and dropped to the ground and went forward to peer into a clump of buck brush a hundred feet from the ravaged camp. A woman regarded him with vague and frightened blue eyes. Her luxurious black hair was loosened about her shoulders. Her face, though young, was strained and smudged with dirt. She put up her hands in a protective gesture and Goodyear saw they were covered with blood. She whimpered with fright and pain.

"Lord God A'Mighty," breathed Goodyear, his heart tightening inside him. "I'm a friend," he said.

She whimpered and motioned with her hand.

Goodyear followed her gaze and sunk to his knees muttering, "Lord God!" he raised the ragged quilt as a quivery wail came forth. It was the sound he'd first heard. The baby's face was red and pinched and as Goodyear stared, it opened its eyes and screwed up its tiny face and uttered another pathetic cry.

The woman was crying softly, "My baby, my baby, my baby. Give me my baby!"

Goodyear saw then the shaft of an arrow sticking from her side. He straightened her out gently, pulling the arrow from the ground beneath her. "We'll take care of baby pretty quick," he assured her. He raised her waist with clumsy fingers and had to cut through another layer of something to look at the wound. He didn't think the arrow had touched a vital organ, but it had to come out.

Her eyes were large as she watched him. "They came in the night," she said. "Not many, I don't know how many. While they were fighting I got baby and ran and hid—"

"Shoot fire," said Goodyear, "you had a time." He slipped his knife from his belt and laboriously circled the hardwood with the blade. He bent it between his fingers and the feathered shaft broke apart with a sharp crack. Goodyear pulled the shaft on through the wound and the woman fainted.

He built a smokeless fire, using charcoal from the hickory bed of the Conestoga, and searched among the ruins until he found a battered pan. He heated water on this and while it was heating he got turpentine from his pack and poured it into the wound on both sides. The woman woke with the sting of the turpentine. The baby cried continuously, making him clumsy with haste.

"My name is Frank," he told her. "Frank Goodyear. I been trapping up here fur nigh a year. Goin' out now."

She nodded, not listening, holding out her arms toward the baby. Goodyear lifted the light bundle, feeling a strange constriction around his heart as he placed the baby in her arms. She held it close as Goodyear squatted before her.

"What's your name?" he asked, "and where you from?"

She smiled shyly at him and said, "Molly Sandison. We're from Illinois. That is, we were—" She looked about quickly, her eyes flooding with tears. "Now I'm—" Again she broke off.

Goodyear smiled a rare smile that lighted his rugged face. "Don't worry, Molly," he said. "I'll take care of you."

The baby still whimpered softly and she dropped her eyes, her hand moving toward her waist. "He's hungry," she said. "I'd like to feed him and if—"

Goodyear turned hastily away as a white, dark-tipped breast appeared.

He acted swiftly now. With an Arapahoe arrow from his pack shoved into his belt, he looked about until he found a good-sized rock. He stood before the gauntest of his pack animals. He gritted his teeth and swung the rock in his two hands. It landed with a solid chunking sound on the animal's forehead. The mare chukkered softly and anxiously as the packhorse dropped. Goodyear stood over the horse and worked the arrowhead into the soft flesh of the pack animal's neck until the bright red blood gouted up. He left the arrow imbedded, after shoving it deep.

His knife slashed at the pack and he tugged and stripped the canvas covering from the beaver. He ripped several of the pelts apart and scattered them, as though they had been torn from hand to hand by greedy plunderers. The remainder of the pelts and the load from a second animal, he buried a hundred feet from the burned train. He carefully covered the fresh earth with a litter of leaves and sticks that he patiently gathered from over a wide area. Then he came back to where he'd left Molly. The baby was crying petulantly and Molly regarded him with concern in her wide blue eyes.

"I—I think I haven't any—milk." She was apologetic.

Goodyear looked at her carefully. Her face was flushed. He touched her forehead and she started and then relaxed. Her head felt hot to his fingers. A fever coming on, he thought, shaking his head. "First thing," he said, "we got to get out of here."

She nodded, holding the baby tightly in her arms, rocking her body back and

forth. "I'm not afraid now," she said simply.

Goodyear felt an obstruction in his throat. She seemed so young. She was pretty, too, he thought and he wondered which of the men was her husband. She had not looked in that direction and he was glad. He didn't want her to start crying and get hysterical, maybe.

HE MADE a gruel from bits of pemmican and the hot water and gave it to her. While she sipped at the gruel he drew on all his skill to rig a two-wheel carry to which he hitched the pack horse he'd unloaded. The pack animal was skittish and Goodyear blindfolded him and then when the girl was finished with her food, he loaded her and the baby on the platform he'd constructed on the two front wheels of the one-horse wagon.

"This is gonna be rough," he warned, "but it's the best I can do."

She tried a smile that didn't quite come off and he quit worrying about her getting hysterical. "Thank you," she said. "You're so kind."

"Shoot fire," said Goodyear gruffly. "Ain't neither."

A half hour from the ruined wagon train, Goodyear called a halt and unloaded Molly and the baby from the rig and made them comfortable. He laid his pistol at her side. "I won't be long," he said. "If a red-headed white man and two half-breeds come up, try to use this on 'em. And if you can't get 'em, use it on yourself. Understand?"

She nodded, her brown face flushing redly, her eyes vague again. The baby whimpered softly and unremittingly, a strange hoarse little sound that Goodyear hurried to get away from.

He went along afoot until he reached the burned wagon train. He methodically retraced his steps, carefully erasing signs of his two-wheel rig and horses. He hoped Tullich would read sign to mean he had joined forces with the wagon train and had been wiped out with the rest. It might just work.

He heard the baby's cries when he was a good hundred yards from where he'd left Molly. He shook his head as he abandoned his trail covering and came swiftly ahead. He knelt beside Molly and spoke to her. Her eyes were closed and she breathed heavily. She did not answer his call. Her hands were hot and dry to his touch and she moaned.

Goodyear stood up irresolutely. The baby's cries were weaker now. He vaguely realized the baby's problem was lack of food and he was troubled. He was deeply troubled. "Now if you was only a colt," he ruminated and then he straightened. He shook his head and then muttered, "Gotta do somethin'."

He went to his saddle bags and got out the blue and white mustache cup. He scoured the cup with gritty dirt scooped from the ground, while a tiny fire blazed hotly under a canvas cover he stripped from the makeshift bed on the two-wheel carry. He heated the mustache cup over the smokeless flame and then when it was hot to his touch he went to the mare. She started away from him when his hands touched her swollen teats and he swore gustily and told her to stand. She stood still for him, uneasily, and his fingers worked clumsily as he tried to force milk from the mare's teats into the mustache cup. In ten minutes the bottom was scarcely covered; then as he became more familiar, and through trial and error, the milk came more freely. He quickly filled the cup and patted the mare's quivering flank and moved back to the whimpering bundle.

He uncovered the baby and held it in the crook of his arm as he squatted on the ground. He let the milk trickle down into the tiny puckered mouth. The baby held up its head, almost eagerly, it seemed to Goodyear. The tiny head with its black ringlets of tight curls moved back and forth hungrily seeking. The milk spilled down its neck. Goodyear cursed softly.

"Here," Molly was conscious, regard-

ing him with wide eyes. She ripped a piece of flannel from her underskirt and held it out to him. "Dip this in and let him nurse it," she said and then asked, "What is it?"

"Mare's milk," Goodyear said shortly. "She lost her colt."

Molly began to cry silently, her shoulders shaking.

Goodyear laid the baby down and knelt beside her. He said gently, "Mare's milk is better than none, Molly. It won't hurt her—"

"It's a boy," Molly said. "And I know mare's milk won't hurt him. It's just that you're so—so good—"

"Shoot fire!" said Goodyear with a roughness he didn't feel. "Ain't neither." He picked up the baby. "Gotta git this kid fed 'fore the milk gets cold."

The baby sucked greedily on the piece of flannel Goodyear kept dipping into the mustache cup. After a time Goodyear said, "A boy, hey? What's his name?"

Molly's voice was small. "Born on the trail. We just called him baby. But I'm naming him Frank."

Goodyear was pleased, but he said, "Ain't much of a name for a big kid like he's gonna be." He looked about as the sun dipped beyond the mountains and quick night came into the valley. "Gonna feel like travel tonight?"

She said, "Yes, Frank. But I—"

"Quiet!" hissed Goodyear. He thrust the baby into Molly's arms and went swiftly to the canvas lean-to he'd constructed over the tiny fire. He scooped dirt into the flames and dropped the canvas and went to the mare. The chestnut stood with her ears erect, staring into the darkness. Goodyear kept his hand on her velvet muzzle, tense, ready to stifle a neigh if he felt her belly swell. He heard the soft thump of hooves in the distance. The mare began grazing and Goodyear felt a nausea at his stomach. If the chestnut knew the scent it was probably Yellow Cloud and his warriors. He went to Molly and leaned over her. "Don't let him cry. Even if you have to put your hand over his mouth."

"He's full and asleep," she whispered.

GOODYEAR went away from the camp on silent feet, his rifle in his two hands. He squatted in the darkness a dozen yards from camp and listened. The sound of hoofbeats died away even as he squatted there and he wondered; had the horses gone beyond earshot or had the band stopped? He sat there speculating on the number of men in the bunch. He sat there worrying for the best part of an hour. He heard nothing more than the rush of the river in the distance and the soft sighing of the chinook in the short brush. Off in the distance a soft shape fluttered away with the wind and he thought hungrily of an antelope steak.

He stood up, stretching. He was tired, so tired his bones ached. The emptiness in his belly was growing sharper and the added responsibility of Molly and the baby was a great weight on him. He moved back to camp, trailing his rifle tiredly in one hand.

They pushed on through the night and with the first dully gray of morning, Goodyear knew they were reaching the end of the trail. If he figured right, Ferrytown was within long rifleshot of the big red rock thrusting up beside the river. He remembered stopping there on the way up a century before. Looking at the initials "JB" carved just saddle high in the red sandstone, Goodyear wondered if Jim Bridger had been that way. He looked back toward the two-wheel rig and said, "Won't be much further, Molly."

She was silent and he thought she was asleep. Then she said, "What'll I do, Frank, what'll I do?"

"You ain't got no kin folks?"

"Not a living soul," she moaned.

"You ain't to worry about it," he ordered and then added, "I got enough fur both of you."

"We can't take it, Frank," she said and he could detect a sniffle in her voice

(Please turn to page 140)

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and somehow it irritated him. "You've done too much, now."

"I wish you'd stop that," he said passionately and then let the mare drop back. He leaned from the saddle and patted her shoulder. "Shoot fire, Molly, I like to help you." He straightened, wondering at the strangeness of it. He was glad now that he hadn't taken on a squaw up at Yellow Cloud's village.

He stopped the mare with a hard hand, raising in his stirrups. He sniffed the air audibly. "Smoke," he murmured and dismounted.

It was lighter now and he could see the mountains, the riffles and foaming rapids below, and around the bend ahead, a single column of blue smoke rose in the thin, cold air.

The baby whimpered softly and Molly said, "He's hungry again, Frank."

Goodyear looked dubiously from the smoke to the mare. He'd milked her twice during the night and each time there was less milk. She was drying up, too.

He milked the mare and got a bare inch of bluish-colored milk from the impatient chestnut. The mare seemed to look at him reproachfully. "Never mind," he said gruffly to the chestnut. "Tain't goin' to last forever—I hope."

He gave the cup to Molly and said, "I'll be back pretty quick," and went off through the brush afoot, the chestnut watching him with her head in the air and ears pointed forward. She whickered softly and he stopped and looked back, cursing softly. He watched her for a moment, unrest on him, and then he went on.

OVER the ridge he stopped and sank to the ground, his heart going heavy inside him. The general store and two buildings that was Ferrytown were a heap of smoking black ashes. The half-burned ferry swung idly in the current held by the cable by which it was pulled from bank to bank. Not a sign of life stirred within his eyesight. He searched the river bank, the timber beyond and the near terrain. Nothing moved but black dots in the blue sky; black dots that grew larger and larger until finally the huge black birds, plainly visible circled over the ruins, gliding effortlessly and silently. Goodyear felt the flesh along his spine tingle. He whirled, his rifle coming up and then he froze.

Tullich stood above him grinning. The big bore of his Henry rifle pointed right at Goodyear's belly. The two half-breeds, one on either side of the huge, red-bearded man, watched Goodyear hungrily.

Tullich's small green eyes seemed obscene. "You're a hard man to catch up to, Goodyear," he said with a chuckle. "Damn near fooled me back there a 'ways."

"At the wagon train?" asked Goodyear. He shifted slightly and subsided when the rifle straightened.

Tullich nodded and the grin faded. "The gal? Where is she?"

"Don't forget beaver," said one of the half-breeds.

"We ain't forgettin' nothin'," Tullich growled. "Where's the gal?" he repeated.

"She died on the trail," said Goodyear. "The baby, too," he added.

"Uh-huh," grunted Tullich. "You don't lie so good!"

"How'd you know?" asked Goodyear. "I covered good back there."

Tullich grinned and looked at the half-breeds, first one, then the other, and they all roared with laughter. Tullich slapped his greasy thigh. "By Gawd, you slipped, Goodyear. And a careful man like you, too. It was the arrow you used on that pack hoss. Wasn't one these boys left there!"

Goodyear raised on his elbow. "You low-down stinkin' buzzard," he said, "I'm sorry to be a white man right now."

Tullich stepped forward and kicked out with a moccasined foot. Goodyear grabbed Tullich's foot and twisted viciously. The big man fell heavily and as he fell Goodyear pulled him on top and whipped out his knife. He laid the

edge on Tullich's throat. "Tell 'em to throw down their guns," he said, "Or by God I'll cut your head off clean!"

"Throw 'em down, you hear 'im, throw 'em down!" screamed Tullich.

Goodyear felt the impact of the bullet in Tullich's body and the big man relaxed on him and become a dead weight. Goodyear kept covered and got the pistol out of Tullich's belt. He shot up between Tullich's arm and body and the slug caught the half-breed just above the right eye. Goodyear saw the purple hole appear as the man fell without a sound. The other breed was pumping lead into the inert body that covered Goodyear and as his mate fell he turned and ran. The pistol empty, Goodrich yanked out the Spencer from under Tullich and fired it like a hand gun. The half-breed stopped and threw up his hands and stumped. He fell and rolled over and over. He was still as Goodyear pushed Tullich aside and stood up.

Blood ran down the front of his buckskin and he picked a heavy slug from the lip of his breast pocket. The blood was Tullich's. He dropped the slug in his pocket and picked up his Spencer and trudged back toward the outfit.

The two-wheeler was empty. Goodrich shouted and ran frenziedly around in circles, calling, "Molly! Molly!" His sense of loss was overwhelming.

She came from the brush, carrying the baby. Her waist was stained red and she ran to him and he held her in his arms for a moment, feeling the strangeness of it and feeling a tenderness for her that was new to him.

He jerked the canvas from the rig and made her lie down. He laid the baby beside her, as it set up a loud wail. The chestnut mare raised her ears and emitted an uneasy chukker that ended in a snort.

"You gotta lie still," warned Goodrich. He slipped up her waist and examined the crusted wound from which dark blood oozed. There seemed to be a little infection around the edges which

[*Turn page*]

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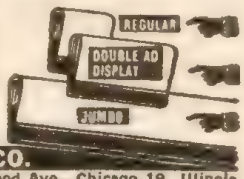

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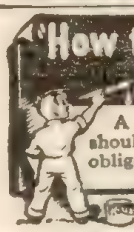

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were white with pus. He shook his head and she shyly pulled her waist down.

The baby continued to wail and Goodrich got the mustache cup and went toward the mare.

YELLOW CLOUD and his warriors came so silently Goodrich was not aware of it. He looked up from his milking and the Indian sat his horse a dozen paces from him. The big buffalo gun Goodrich had traded him lay across his thighs. A dozen painted warriors spread out evenly in a half-circle.

Goodrich continued his milking after nodding curtly. But inside him his heart thumped against his ribs and blood came up in his ears. He didn't give a hoot about himself but the little fellow and Molly—he felt the weight of their dependence on him more than ever before. He stood up finally, ignoring the Indians and went to Molly and took the bit of flannel and began feeding the baby. The Indians closed in, their curiosity aroused. Outside of a few jeers they were strangely silent, watching.

When the baby finished, Goodyear wrapped him in the ragged quilt and laid him beside his mother. He stood up, straight and tall, folded his arms across his chest and waited for Yellow Cloud to speak. A brave fitted an arrow to a bow string and the others raised their spears and tomahawks.

Yellow Cloud held up his hand. "Why you protect these people who do us harm!" he asked. "You who are our friend? You have taken our wealth and left us little." He held up the buffalo gun. "This is no good. I am without weapons. I thought you to be my friend!"

The brave with the bow let the string go and the arrow landed between Goodrich's moccasined feet. He ignored it. "Why not tell me," he demanded, "instead of crying like a squaw? It is not like a great warrior to do things this way!"

Yellow Cloud was silent and Goodyear continued. "And the gun—give it to

me." He took the buffalo gun in his hands. He saw at a glance the cause of the trouble, but he said nothing of that. He thrust his Spencer toward Yellow Cloud. "This gun is better. Take it."

Crippled Pony pushed forward, warning Yellow Cloud against taking the gun.

"And another thing," Goodyear went on, ignoring Crippled Pony, "you say I protect your enemies—have you seen the red-bearded Tullich and his renegades on the ridge yonder?" He waved his hand in the direction of Tullich and the breeds.

Yellow Cloud waved two men away to investigate.

Yellow Cloud shook his head. "It is too late, Yalea," he said. He took the Spencer and passed it to a brave. He reached for the buffalo gun, too, and sat waiting for his braves to return from the ridge. They raced back and reported what they'd found.

Goodyear waited until they finished. Then he said, "I would not lie to you for my life—or their lives," and he nodded toward Molly and the baby. "I swear to you that these men attacked and killed your scouts. They burned the wagon train. They burned Ferrytown. They hoped to blame your trouble on the whites. They hoped to blame the white's trouble on you and have soldiers chasing you until your squaws wouldn't have time to set up your teepees and your children would be hungry."

Yellow Cloud stared incredulously. Then he spoke quietly to the man at his side. It was Crippled Pony.

Crippled Pony chose another warrior and they trotted off together.

"If what you say is true," Yellow Cloud said, "then it is true we have no cause for war. Crippled Pony will go to the burned wagon-train. He will know if you lie."

Goodyear nodded. He would have liked someone other than Crippled Pony to investigate; but the die was cast. "What about my woman and baby?" he asked. "She is wounded and the baby will die of hunger."

[*Turn page*]

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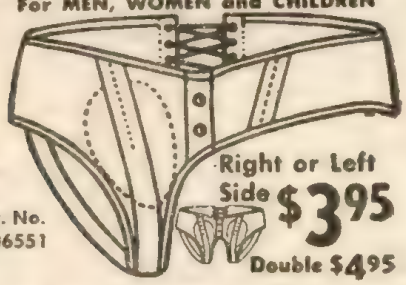

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A thin touch of humor came and went in Yellow Cloud's face. "The mare does not give good milk?"

The humor was lost on Goodyear. "She's drying up fast," he said.

"Then we go," said Yellow Cloud, "to our village. A squaw who lost her own papoose is waiting in my own lodge."

Goodyear rode beside the two-wheeled rig. He leaned from his saddle to reassure Molly.

"They like you," she said. "I can tell they like you."

Goodyear shook his head. If she only knew about Crippled Pony. And he couldn't tell her. No use worrying her, he thought.

ALONE brave went ahead to announce the coming of the war party. The group rode into the Arapahoe village, the painted lodges gay and drab, orderly and in disarray, just as in any town through which Goodyear had ever rode. There were many people Goodyear knew but they showed no signs of recognizing him. He had hunted with them, had eaten with them and played games with them, but now they stared stolidly, with no show of friendliness. He was worried. He wished he had his Spencer in his hand.

They stopped before Yellow Cloud's lodge and Goodyear dismounted.

"Bring your woman into my lodge," said Yellow Cloud. With another word he dispersed the crowd that had followed them down between the rows of lodges.

Goodyear took Molly in his arms and stooped to enter the teepee. Molly held the baby. He laid her gently on a pile of furs and Yellow Cloud cleared the women from his lodge, except for one who sat with bowed head, her arms covered with encrusted blood.

Yellow Cloud spoke to her rapidly. She blinked and then rocked forward on her hands and knees, peering at the patchwork quilt. She reached out for the baby, slowly at first, and then eagerly. She hugged the baby to her breast. Molly looked at Goodyear and tears

stood in her eyes. Goodyear shook his head.

The Indian woman bared her breast and the baby sucked noisily and greedily. Molly looked jealously on. Goodyear turned away and followed Yellow Cloud from the lodge.

Crippled Pony and a brave raced down between the lodges with dogs barking at their heels. They pulled up their foaming mounts and threw themselves to the ground. They yelled and pranced around brandishing their hatchets and Goodyear had a hard time following their talk. He got the drift then, and stiffened and faced Yellow Cloud.

"It is as you say," Yellow Cloud said with dignity. "You may go when you will. You may take the squaw with you to feed the baby."

Goodyear could scarce keep his face from breaking into a smile. He fingered his beard. "Wonder what she'll think of me with this off—and a clean suit of buckskin?" He spoke in English. Yellow Cloud politely asked him to repeat it in Arapahoe.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON PAGE 127

1 A rustler who has killed a mother cow in order to steal her calf is said to have "pinned the crape on the kid."

2 Because a "snow-bird" was a man who enlisted for the long, tough winter, and then deserted in the spring when the living was easier.

3 A "go-easter" is a carpetbag, used by cowhands for carrying clothing and such when taking a long trip by stagecoach or train.

4 A bump in the road was called an "excuse-me-ma'am" . . . for obvious reasons, if you'll study the picture.

5 The cowhand is "raising" the tree by simply seeing it . . . the term means seeing something or someone way off in the distance.

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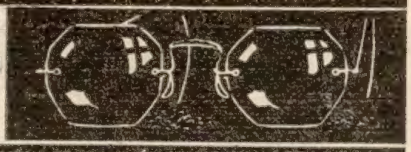

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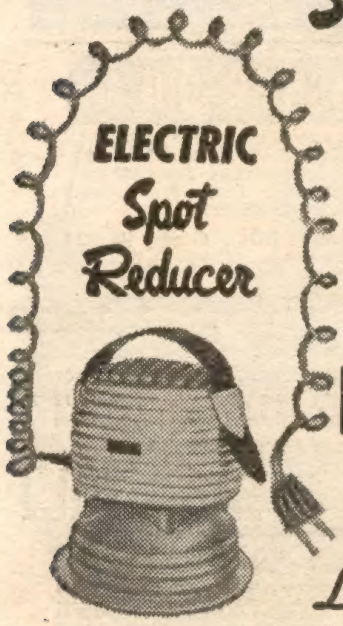

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